

A CALL TO SERVE IS A CALL TO PREPARE:
THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR MINISTERS WITH LIMITED ACCESS TO
TRADITIONAL METHODS
(A CASE STUDY AMONG NATIVE AMERICANS IN OCCUPIED NICARAGUA)

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To Hilario and Doris, my Rama brother and sister who first invited me into their home. And to Miss Sarita, whose words still ring true, “the Indian is tough.”

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ABSTRACT

God calls people worldwide to serve in ministry, including in regions where literacy, poverty, and geography limit access to theological education. As a result, their ministries, and those among whom they serve, suffer. It is the church's duty, for her own good, to find ways to meet these needs.

This thesis-project is a case study among the Rama Nation, an indigenous community along the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua. They are an ethnic minority that has experienced centuries of oppression ever since the arrival of Columbus. They have been displaced, are desperately poor, discouraged, and threatened with cultural extinction. From among them, though, God has called a man of vision and conviction to serve as founding pastor of the first indigenous church in their community. The project recounts the initial steps of his theological preparation for ministry, with the goal of education being academically accessible and contextually sensitive to the cultural values and fragile circumstances of the people.

INTRODUCTION

In seminary, students are frequently reminded that, in the study and preaching of God's word, the original as well as present-day contexts matter. One of my favorite quotes in that regard comes from twentieth century martyr Oscar Arnulfo Romero, archbishop of San Salvador at the time of his assassination in 1980. It has been said of Romero that, during his Sunday homilies, "one could walk down the street without missing a sentence, passing from one person's radio to the next."¹ Romero observed that, "It is very easy to be servants of the word without disturbing the world... a word that can sound in any part of the world because it belongs to no part of the world."² For preaching to communicate a word that encourages, edifies, convicts, or disturbs, context matters. The same is true for understanding the focus of this thesis project; the context of the ministry in which I serve is key to understanding both its goals and hoped-for outcomes, so this introduction begins with a virtual tour of the tropical rainforest of Central America.

I serve as "missionary of encouragement" for SIGA Ministry Partners, a non-profit entity which I founded in 2004. Personnel on the ground consist of my husband Carlos and myself. It is an ecumenical ministry with no formal denominational ties. The base of operations for SIGA (Servants in Grace Abounding) is Arbolitos de Sarapiquí, a subsistence farming community through which northward flows the Sarapiquí River. The

¹ Robert Pelton, ed., *Archbishop Romero: Martyr and Prophet for the New Millennium* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2006), 8.

² Oscar Arnulfo Romero, in Sobrino, Jon, *Archbishop Romero: Memories and Reflections* (New York: Maryknoll, 1990), 20.

Sarapiquí empties into the San Juan River, which proceeds out of Lake Cocibolca (Lake Nicaragua). The San Juan forms the international boundary between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The region is a lush tropical rainforest that is geographically isolated from the rest of the country and where, quite literally, the best roads are the rivers.

Responding to Holy Nudges

During my first year of the Master of Divinity program at the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, Virginia, I made my initial trip to the Sarapiquí. I never expected for God to call me to serve there, but on my second visit, after an intense week of ministry, I spent a day relaxing in the coastal village of Cahuita on the Caribbean, my mind unoccupied by any thought, except for the rhythm of gentle waves of a calm sea caressing the coral reef. I clearly remember the moment when it seemed as if one of those tiny waves had lifted up and come crashing down over my head. I was still dry, of course, but I distinctly heard God say, “I want you here.”

That clear call was absent any particular details as to what, even generally, God wanted me to do, but the call was unmistakable. I had received a “holy nudge” that initiated a year-long process of winding down affairs back home: informing friends and family, resigning from my job, selling my home and possessions, and temporarily dropping out of seminary. I promised my professors that I would finish my degree. It took nine years instead of the usual three or four to do it, completing assignments from the jungle, and occasionally traveling back to Virginia for on-site classes, but I was able to keep that promise.

The “where” of ministry was established, but the “what” was slow in coming into focus. How to survive financially was not clear either. I had already been without steady employment for a year while attending seminary, so I controlled spending carefully. I would rather do without most basic necessities before I would beg for money, but after selling my house, paying off all debts, and setting aside funds for emergencies, I still had \$6,000. I calculated that I could live on that amount for one year. After that, it would be up to God, and I prayed, “I hope you have a plan beyond that, because I am too old to start all over again.”

During that year, I married Carlos, while waiting for the “what” of ministry to be revealed. God had a “who” in mind, which I had not even anticipated. Neither of us had a source of income, so we decided to temporarily occupy a small house that he owned in Arbolitos. My husband worked odd jobs milking cows by hand and mending fences, while I spent my days lying in a hammock, studying the Bible and praying for direction. I was being forced to take one day at a time, with few practical responsibilities except to try not to burn the rice and beans, and to listen to God through Scripture, prayer, and through the sounds of the village and its people. I was learning to trust in God and not in my ability to make things happen.

The house that Carlos owned was built by him and his father, from lumber that Carlos cut with a chainsaw and carried from his father’s farm on his shoulders. Arbolitos was, at that time, the only village in the region with a high school, and he, the eldest of fourteen, had younger siblings that wanted to go to high school. Carlos, who had been deprived of a formal education when he was a child, determined that his brothers and sisters would have the opportunity. The house is about 54 meters square (approximately

580 square feet). It lacked running water, but we would not have to pay rent, and with no electricity, there also were no utility bills.

Thus we became situated in the small, rural farming village of Arbolitos de Sarapiquí (Appendix D), awakened each day not by an alarm clock, but by howling monkeys, chirping birds, barking dogs, and crowing roosters. Ten years later, we still live in that same primitive house, except that we have since added the luxuries of running water and electricity.

We owned neither boat nor car, so I started doing ministry locally. In fact, I only went as far as the barbed-wire fence that our property shares with the public school. The children would crawl under the fence during recess and play in our yard, which is how I came to know them. I started a Saturday morning Bible Club, and anywhere from five to fifteen children would come. We would read a Bible story, do arts and crafts, and have refreshments. I modeled these activities after the Vacation Bible School programs many churches have. It was through that experience that I realized that none of the children had Bibles, or any other books for that matter.

Later I also realized that there were no books in the school. How can they learn if they have nothing to read? Due to the close proximity of the school to my home, I could eavesdrop on the teacher from my living room hammock. Lessons consisted of the teacher writing on the chalk board and the children copying what was written into their composition books, so that they could subsequently repeat it on a test. This was the first real culture shock that I experienced, and it resulted in our decision to build a learning center, which houses a children's library, a computer lab, a multi-use salon, and now, a small theological library.

On the heels of the learning center initiative came the Floating Library, an adaptation of the bookmobile that would visit rural areas back home. With the boat, we could travel to other isolated pueblos along the river, loaning books to the little one-room schools, some with as few as five students. Many children do not go beyond the sixth grade. Gradually, outreach expanded to include twenty schools. Some of our efforts have been quite successful; others not so. Nonetheless, we hope that some of the children will envision a future beyond swinging a *machete* as a *peón* on someone else's farm and choose to stay in school, get a high school diploma and even go to college. We are only now beginning to see that happen.

During the first year of ministry, we started visiting other villages at Christmastime. This was a knee-jerk reaction to a three-year-old boy proudly showing me the one Christmas gift he had received the year prior—a glass bottle of men's cologne. God used this to open doors for ministry in those communities. I obliged them with English programs, which is what they asked for, typically combined with music or arts and crafts. They also agreed to my “teaching religion” to the children.

Despite what many of our activities may indicate, SIGA is neither an education ministry nor children's ministry. Those were simply the first needs that we encountered. SIGA is not primarily a ministry of any one thing, which is why we call it a “ministry of encouragement.” Our lack of self-definition as to what we do, and our desire to truly be Servants in Grace Abounding, have led to involvement in diverse activities. How we make decisions is simple. We observe, we pray, and we wait for that holy nudge.

Nudged into Nicaragua

I had met Miss Julia only once before, during one of my previous short-term visits to Costa Rica. A member of the Rama Nation, an indigenous community in Nicaragua, she had travelled to the Sarapiquí hoping to find work. Her house had burned down, and she had lost everything. Unsuccessful in her job search, and perhaps because she did not know where else to go, she asked someone along the river where we lived. There she was, in our doorway. Miss Julia wanted to know if I would visit her village and help her people. The “Spanish people” have churches there, she says, but her people do not.

It was a natural progression for our ministry to extend into Nicaragua, given our close geographical proximity.³ However, at the time of Miss Julia’s visit, we had been in Arbolitos barely a year. We had no boat, and the area where Miss Julia lives is on the southernmost part of the Caribbean, where there are no roads into the region. A visit was out of the question at the time, but Miss Julia had planted the idea, a seed which would lie dormant for at least another year, before a holy nudge would move us forward.

That nudge came when SIGA received a donation of four hundred backpacks to be distributed along with the Christmas gifts that we provide to area children each year. Volunteers had placed a reading book in each backpack; however, the books were in English. This created a small dilemma. We always encourage the children to read, but they only read Spanish. We did not want the only book that a child owned to be one that was impossible for that child to read, so we took them out.

What were we going to do with 400 books in English? That is when we remembered the Rama—they speak *English*. I obtained the telephone number of Hilario

³ For map of Nicaragua, which shows indigenous territories, see Appendix D.

McCrea John, the then-president of the Rama community government. Would the books be of value to his community? “Sure,” he says, “come on up!” By then we had a boat, so Carlos and I went on a four-hour voyage to the town of San Juan de Nicaragua, and thus began our relationship with the Indian River community of Native Americans known as the Rama Nation.⁴

⁴ The Rama, at least those who live in the Indian River community, self-identify either “Indian” or *indígena*. Terms such as First Nations or Native Americans are not used; therefore, when referring specifically to the Rama, I will generally refer to them as Indian or indigenous.

I. THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

Those English-language children's books which had been stuffed into backpacks, intended as gifts for children in Costa Rica, provided the impetus, the nudge, for our first journey into Rama territory. Their ancestral lands encompass approximately 450,000 hectares (1.1 million acres) stretching from the city of Bluefields southward along the Caribbean Coast to the San Juan River. Explorations have uncovered evidence that the territory belonging to the Rama has been inhabited for several thousand years, making it one of the oldest archaeological sites in Central America.¹

As an ethnic group, the Rama are small in number, consisting of from 2,000 to 3,000 people,² of which 300 live in the Indian River region. Of the Indian River Rama, 200 now reside in San Juan de Nicaragua, a village of about 1,500 people, while a few families have remained in the rainforest. In the village, children can attend public school, and modern conveniences such as electricity are available.

Most Rama homes are without running water, and the wells, typically under one meter in depth, are contaminated. The water table being very close to the surface, drainage is poor. Outhouses are typically concrete, elevated above ground level by about two meters. A bucket underneath catches excrement, which is subsequently dumped into

¹ Gerald Mueller, *Defending Rama Indian Community Lands and the Southeastern Nicaragua Biosphere* (Four Directions Consulting: published ca. 2002 based upon reference to field work in 2001), 14, accessed Sept 16, 2015, http://conservation.law.ufl.edu/pdf/rama/rama_report.pdf.

² Miguel Gonzalez, et al., eds., *El Pueblo Rama Luchando por Tierra y Cultura* (Tromso, Norway: University of Tromso and URRACAN, published ca. 2008), 159, accessed February 15, 2014, http://pueblosindigenaspcn.net/biblioteca/sistemas-de-naciones-unidas/doc_view/88-el-pueblo-rama-luchando-por-tierra-y-cultura.html. Estimates vary widely regarding the actual population of the Rama Nation. The Autonomy Statute passed in 1987, places the total population at 850. This work indicates 1,500 total with close to 1000 on Rama Cay alone. A recent census by local leaders places the population of the Indian River community at 300 and the total population at approximately 3,000.

the *Laguna Papagayo*, which of course is contaminated. This means that clean drinking water is a problem. The municipal government has installed a water treatment facility to provide safe water, but most of the Rama cannot afford the modest monthly charge, so they do not take advantage of the new system.

Deprived of the ability to provide for their families via traditional methods and without steady employment, health care, or in many instances, proper sanitation, theirs is a precarious existence. They are the poorest of the poor, in a country that is the second-poorest in the western hemisphere. Multiple external forces, mostly beyond their control, threaten their existence as a distinct, indigenous people. The virgin tropical rainforest that has been their ancestral home for millennia has fallen victim to squatters, unscrupulous land developers, illegal lumber operations, and government incursion. Denied the right to live on the land according to their native customs, the Rama are unable to defend it. Much has been lost already—their native language, their ancestral lands, their traditional livelihood—and the pace of this erosion has quickened in recent decades.

The generations born in the Indian River community after the migration from the north that began during the Nicaraguan Revolution and ensuing civil war, have no memory of life on Rama Cay (“key”), from which many of the Indian River community migrated. Neither do they identify with the church that once took center stage in the social and spiritual life of the people. If the older generations die before that culture can be transmitted to subsequent generations, it may disappear for good. Those are dire predictions, but history of other indigenous populations throughout the Americas has shown that this is exactly what will happen, unless the Rama people themselves can reverse the trend of the last several decades. What is most surprising is that anything of

indigenous culture still exists. Miss Sarita explains it quite simply: “the Indian is tough.” Tough, yes, but not invincible.

In 1502, Cristobal Colón (Christopher Columbus) stopped at Rama territory known as Monkey Point. There he kidnapped two indigenous “specimens”, and “thus got relations between Spain and the inhabitants of Nicaragua’s Atlantic coast off to a bad start.”³ The aftershocks of this event are still felt today, so a brief summary of how the Rama have come to such a precarious existence begins with the arrival of the *conquistadores*.

A Sovereign Nation Under Foreign Occupation

Not far from San Juan de Nicaragua—about 3 kilometers by water—lie the ruins of what once was a bustling seaport. Situated behind an expansive Sandinista Army post and a new, out-of-place looking airport, lies the abandoned village of Greytown. I asked Hilario to take me there, so we, accompanied by his wife Doris and two youngest daughters, head out in his small boat.

The tide is low, and we see the rusted remains of an old steamship, half-submerged in the surrounding waters. Rising up from the middle of the Greytown Lagoon, the “*draga*”⁴ is an imposing iron structure, badly rusting but quite impressive still and easily visible from a distance. Built by the British, it is a reminder of the “canal fever” that was epidemic among foreign powers throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. The towering structure was once a steam-powered dredging machine

³ Jose Delores Gamez, *Historia de Nicaragua* (Madrid: Escuela Profesional de Artes Graficas, 1888, 90-91), in Mueller, 14.

⁴ Appendix B, Figure 4.

that was used to build a canal from Greytown to the San Juan River, the entryway to a yet-to-be-built inter-oceanic canal. Industrial magnate Cornelius Vanderbilt⁵ and the Italian Francisco Pellas both took an interest in the area.⁶ So did the infamous William Walker, a North American mercenary who, along with his private army, terrorized much of Central America, once even proclaiming himself to be president of Nicaragua.⁷ Spain, Great Britain, and the United States all vied to control the canal project. It was never completed—Panama was chosen instead—but the obsession to build an inter-oceanic canal through Nicaragua remains to this day, and the ruins of once-bustling Greytown reflect a long history of occupation of land that belongs to the Indian.

After passing the *draga*, we stop at an army post to ask permission to visit Greytown. On foot, we cross the airstrip into a field. Nestled under trees along the edge of the forest are the ruins of a plantation which was built in 1875 by the wealthy Pellas, who owned and operated a fleet of 23 ships.⁸ A short walk from the site of the Pellas plantation, which the forest has mostly reclaimed, there is a long, rusting iron fence enclosing an abandoned cemetery. Actually, there are *four* cemeteries, representing the many competing forces that have, at one time or another, occupied this land that never legitimately belonged to them. There is the North American cemetery called the “Sabine”⁹ after a naval vessel of that name. Adjacent to it is a British cemetery, followed

⁵ History.com Staff, “Cornelius Vanderbilt,” History.com, published 2010, accessed February 4, 2016, <http://www.history.com/topics/cornelius-vanderbilt>.

⁶ Figure 2, Appendix B. Origins of the steam ship in photo are unknown.

⁷ “William Walker—Emperor of Nicaragua,” accessed February 4, 2016, <http://www.nicaragua-guide.com/william-walker.html>.

⁸ Information taken from a sign posted at the site of the ruins.

⁹ Figure 3, Appendix A.

by a separate Masonic cemetery,¹⁰ and finally, representing the arrival of the Spanish, a Roman Catholic cemetery.¹¹

As was the case in so many parts of the Americas, the indigenous people of the Atlantic coast experienced the devastating effects of European, as well as North American, colonialism. Throughout all of the Americas, a genocide of epic proportions had occurred. In Mexico, for instance, indigenous peoples were reduced in number from about 25.2 million in 1520 to 1.3 million in 1578, a span of just fifty years.¹² Whether by disease or fighting, the only way to explain these numbers is genocide. Martin Luther King, Jr. observed,

Our nation was born in genocide when it embraced the doctrine that the original American, the Indian, was an inferior race. Even before there were large numbers of Negroes on our shores, the scar of racial hatred had already disfigured colonial society. From the sixteenth century forward, blood flowed in battles of racial supremacy. We are perhaps the only nation which tried as a matter of national policy to wipe [out] its indigenous population... [and] we elevated that tragic experience into a noble crusade.¹³

King's observation is correct; the Indian was perceived as an inferior race. Genocide was policy in the Thirteen Colonies and outlying colonized territories before the American Revolution. After the Revolution, the mass resettlement of Native Americans onto reservations, and the forced integration of Indian children into boarding

¹⁰ Figure 5, Appendix A.

¹¹ Figure 1, Appendix A.

¹² Luis N. Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), originally published as *Evangelización y Violencia: La Conquista de América* (San Juan Puerto Rico: Editorial CEMI, 1991), 173. The timing of the publication of the original Spanish-language version is no accident, being one year before the five-hundred year anniversary of Christopher Columbus's "discovery" of the new world.

¹³ Martin Luther King, Jr., excerpt from *Why We Can't Wait*, 1963, accessed February 10, 2016, Native News Online.Net, <http://nativenewsonline.net/opinion/dr-martin-luther-king-jr-nation-born-genocide>.

schools yielded the same result—genocide, if not always physically, then certainly culturally. Genocide accompanied the colonizing invaders wherever they went.

The invasion by European powers of what would become Nicaragua had initiated a process of destabilization for the indigenous population, a decline that continues today. “Spain imposed its religion, its language, its oligarchic form of government and its patterns of production” on the Pacific, as well as “its rivalry and antagonism it felt to everything British, the other major invading force.”¹⁴ Their vast rainforest was difficult to penetrate, and provided a level of protection against invasion, but the Rama had not escaped the genocide inflicted by the colonizers:

Throughout much of the 18th Century the British, assisted by their Miskito Indian allies, captured Votos [Rama] from the Monkey Point and Punta Gorda area to be sold as slaves in the West Indies and North America. This problem was severe enough that the Englishman Edward Long reported in 1774 that several Voto or Rama... were fleeing to Spanish settlements in the interior. In this same year the Voto or Rama had apparently abandoned the Río Punta Gorda completely, with many others relocating to the Río Indio [Indian River].¹⁵

The British later cultivated alliances with the natives, because they needed help in battling the Spanish. They actively encouraged animosity toward the Spanish, as well as against Roman Catholicism, the religion imported from Spain. A lingering animosity continues to be evident, as the Indians refer to the dominant mestizos as “Spanish people,” while the mostly-mestizo Latinos claim to be the “real Nicaraguans.”

¹⁴ Ray Hooker, in Miguel Gonzalez, et al, eds., *El Pueblo Rama Luchando por su Tierra y Cultura* (Tromso, Norway: University of Tromso and Universidad URACCAN, 2006), 35, accessed April 14, 2017, <https://waniwanka.org/send/3-interculturalidad/103-el-pueblo-rama-luchando-por-tierra-y-cultura>. This quote is from a speech by Ray Hooker regarding the Autonomy Process. It contains important facts, but on other points it appears that his speech was a platform for Sandinista (FSLN) propaganda.

¹⁵ Mueller, 17.

In 1860, Great Britain signed the Treaty of Managua, which recognized Nicaraguan sovereignty over the Atlantic coast, excluding the central portion of the territory, which was designated an autonomous Miskitu Reserve, governed by a Miskitu king, who actually was half Rama.¹⁶ However, during the 34 years of its existence, the Miskitu Reserve was dominated by North American mining, logging, and banana companies extracting great wealth from the land. The reserve remained a British protectorate until 1894, when José Santos Zelaya, then President of Nicaragua, ordered the “reincorporation” of the reserve into Nicaragua.¹⁷

Evidently, Zelaya had also contracted Canal Fever, wanting to join the two coasts by both a canal and a railroad. To promote that project, he granted several parcels of land that were not his to give—Rama land—to political allies in order to facilitate the construction of a seaport at Monkey Point, which lies within Rama territory. Although Zelaya’s plans were never realized, heirs of his cronies to whom he had granted those parcels are now claiming to “own” those lands.¹⁸ One hundred years later, these “owners” resurface just when the current president, Daniel Ortega, has launched a massive canal and railway project that will cut through that same territory.

In the 1930s the Somoza family took control of the country, ruling Nicaragua for more than fifty years, until the regime was toppled by the Sandinista-led revolutionaries in July 1979. However, Cold War-era fears regarding additional communist encroachment into the Americas led to US intervention. The “Contras” (counter-revolutionaries) opposing the Sandinista regime were trained and equipped by the CIA,

¹⁶ Mueller, 20.

¹⁷ Mueller, 21.

¹⁸ Mueller, 21.

and the Sandinistas received support from the Soviet Union. Hence, an internal civil war between ideological factions was also a proxy war between two world powers.

For the most part, the indigenous people of the Atlantic coast were ambivalent about this war between two “Spanish” groups, until the Sandinistas attempted to nationalize indigenous lands and relocate Indians into settlement camps, where they ostensibly would be provided with “better housing, better schools and health facilities.”¹⁹ The people naturally resented being forcibly displaced from their homes. As a result, indigenous fighters joined the Contras, and by the end of 1984, the Caribbean coast had become a major battleground. Greytown was the site of one of those bloody battles, proof of which lies within the iron gates of the cemeteries, where bullet holes and broken grave markers are still visible.

After centuries of meddling by foreign powers, it was the civil war following the Nicaraguan Revolution that finally spelled the end of Greytown. As was the case with much of the border region, most inhabitants had fled during the war—the Rama Indian into the bush, and the Latino into Costa Rica. Once peace had been declared, some former residents attempted to return to Greytown. However, dead bodies lying in the wake of the bloody battle that had occurred had contaminated the water supply. The mosquitos were intolerable and residents feared for their lives due to the threat of disease.

According to Hilario, who fought in that battle, the mayor of Greytown asked the Rama for permission to move further northward. As a compassionate gesture toward those who had only recently been enemy combatants, the Rama turned the other cheek and showed hospitality to the “foreigner” living in their land. They welcomed them into

¹⁹ Hooker, 39.

their neighborhood, never imagining that these “real Nicaraguans” would lay claim to the village now known as San Juan de Nicaragua.

Just as a civil war had turned Greytown into a ghost town, two hundred plus years of colonialism have devastated the entire Atlantic coast, once a land where “food was in abundance; every family had a home ... verdant forest extended over the entire territory ... [and] the communities were self-sufficient and the people lived in harmony with their environment.”²⁰

The Sandinista government neutralized its Indian problem as well as appeased the international community by initiating the “Autonomy Process,” which resulted in a series of laws recognizing “that the peoples of Caribbean Nicaragua were entitled to exercise special political, social, economic and cultural rights in the territories where they have traditionally lived.”²¹ The laws additionally provide that the territory can neither be legally bought or sold.²² At the time, the original inhabitants of Nicaragua could not have possibly known that autonomy would mostly be on paper. It was a tool that would convince them to lay down their arms, but would be disregarded whenever it became inconvenient for the government.

²⁰ Hooker, 42.

²¹Centro de Asistencia Legal para Pueblos Indigenas (CALPI), accessed August 6, 2014, <http://www.calpi.nativeweb.org>. Article IV states in part that “the revolutionary struggle of the Nicaraguan people to build a new multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-lingual nation based on democracy, pluralism, anti-imperialism, and the elimination of all forms of social exploitation and oppression, requires the institutionalization of the Autonomy process of the Communities of the Atlantic Coast whereby the political, economic, social, and cultural rights of its inhabitants are recognized...” Article VII states that “the new constitutional order of Nicaragua... recognizes the rights of the Communities of the Atlantic Coast to preserve their languages, religions, art, and culture, *to use and enjoy the communal waters, forests, and lands... and to live in the ways which correspond to their legitimate traditions.*” Emphasis added.

²² CALPI, Title IV, Chapter 1, Article 36: “The communal property is constituted by the land, waters, and forests which traditionally has belonged to the communities of the Atlantic Coast, and... are indissoluble; they cannot be donated, sold, leased nor taxed, and they are eternal.”

There have been continuing attempts to uproot Rama communities from their homes and resettle them elsewhere. In 2001, there was an attempt to relocate the Indian River community to the San Juanillo River further south, where there would be fewer restrictions on their activities. Community president at the time, Hilario, who had fought in the war and had taken part in peace negotiations, and who had seen and heard promises made and promises broken time and again, was not going to allow the people to be uprooted from their homes. Hilario recounts the situation:

Them say *vida silvestre* cause we mind this place for 2000 years. I make MARENA know that. That we the Rama Indian mind it for 2000 years, our great grandfathers, that we never destroy it. Now, because them don't have a reserve in Managua, them comin' and puttin' a law on us. That we will mind the bush, that to no cut tree, to no kill the animal, to no catch the fish, to no plant. I say, come MARENA, one moment. I say, you show me your reserve what you have in Managua with the government. Then you come and give me a law here. Because I mind this place for 2000 years. My grandfather tell me don't destroy the land. And we know how to live. That's why they call it *vida silvestre*. Them say if them can take we down from here, them will give we the San Juanillo for plant. I say no. I want nothing to do with San Juanillo. I want my home *here*. This is my home and you not taking me out from here. The San Juanillo have a good land, but it's a low land. Any time a flood come the flood sink it, and then you plant for nothing. All would get die. Here no sink. Here you have land and you work like how you want. And I tell him: Our system is not like what the Spaniard have. The Spaniard have a system that them come and chop down ten, fifteen manzanas. And after them done chop down that, them plant grass. And they make a cattle farm. After ten years I sell you this. This cost so much thousand córdoba. And then they go and fight a next place. I say no, we no have that history. Our history is to mind our territory until the last future die. But we never have a system in our history to sell our land. Because after we sell our land, where we will go? We go fight a next people in them home? No we never accustom that, never yet in we life. So that's why we defend our land, for no molest nobody, and nobody molest we. That is it.²³

²³ Mueller, 73.

Begging for resolution are the steady encroachment of *mestizo* farmers into Rama land, a phenomenon known as the “agricultural frontier,”²⁴ and the conflicts arising from Rama land—legally theirs, even today—being designated a biological reserve. Entire villages have been attacked by masked gunmen, including one case where the Rama men were tied up and the women were gang raped.²⁵ In some cases, these attacks appear to be linked to land speculators. One case is reported to have occurred in Eagle Point (*Bankukuk Taik* or *Punta de Águila*), which lies within Rama territory. A real estate developer based in Florida, who had gained notoriety by attempting to develop the Pearl Cays belonging to the Miskitu to the north, sent crews to Eagle Point to clear the land, erect fences, and build a house.²⁶

During one of my earlier trips to San Juan de Nicaragua, Rama leaders had called an emergency meeting to address a similar situation. Not all of these occurrences get reported in the press, which is censored. Although Rama leaders have recounted to me similar events that have occurred in recent years, I have chosen to detail only published reports, in part to protect the source, and in part for my own safety.

As part of the Autonomy Process that had brought for a time a glimmer of hope to the *costeños* of the Caribbean, indigenous territory was divided into two separately-governed Autonomous Regions, RAAN (*Región Autónoma Atlántica del Norte*) and RAAS (*Región Autónoma Atlántica del Sur*). Within these two regions live the poorest of

²⁴ Svein Jentoff, “The Poverty Trap: Defending the Rama Peoples’ Resource Rights,” in Gonzalez, 139.

²⁵ Jentoff, 79. Attacks on Wiring Cay occurred in 2000 and Monkey Point in 2001. Also in 2001, another group attacked Big Hill south of Rama Cay. In this last instance, nine Rama men were captured and tied up with barbed wire, while the women were forced to remove their clothing and were raped. Men who had escaped were able to contact authorities, but authorities failed to respond.

²⁶ Mueller, 79.

the poor, with the highest levels of illiteracy and the highest rates of unemployment.²⁷

Due to the remoteness of both RAAS and RAAN, the costs associated with transporting goods from the Pacific, as well as high fuel costs, the cost of living is 15-20% higher than it is for the rest of the country.²⁸ The Autonomy Process had been introduced into a very bleak situation, and implementation was seen as a “life or death task” for indigenous survival.²⁹ It had injected a ray of hope into the lives of the people. However, their optimism was not matched by a commitment on the part of the central government to respect its own laws. Indeed, when I first began working with the Rama of the Indian River in 2008, there was an optimism about the future that today is difficult to detect.

Beginning with the arrival of the British in 1748, occupying forces have deprived the Rama of their right to self-determination, and that holds true even today. Little appears to have been done to honor their history and traditions; in fact, the opposite seems to be the case. The repercussions of foreign invaders, even those who came with good intentions, still linger. As in so many parts of the Americas, missionaries “not only preached a new gospel of salvation, but also just as energetically imposed a new cultural model for existence on Indian people.”³⁰ In the name of the gospel, “the kerygmatic

²⁷ Hooker, 42.

²⁸ Danilo Saavedra and Suyapa Ortega Thomas, “Caracterización socioeconómica de la Región Autónoma del Atlántico Norte (RAAN) de Nicaragua,” Fundación para el Desarrollo Tecnológico Agropecuario y Forestal de Nicaragua (FUNICA), Fundación Ford (Ford Foundation), and Gobierno Regional de la RAAN, July 2009, 30, accessed February 20, 2016, <http://funica.org.ni/docs/Caracterizacion%20socioeconomica%20de%20la%20RAAN%20VF%20ES.pdf>. Primitive roads serving the area are impassable during the rainy season, and continual conflicts for political control further contribute to socioeconomic instability and inhibit advancement of sustainable human development programs. At the same time, the autonomous regions are rich in natural resources that government, investors, and locals vie to exploit.

²⁹ Saavedra, 43.

³⁰ George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 4.

content of the missionary's Christian faith became confused with the accoutrements of the missionary's cultural experience and behavior."³¹

Across denominational lines, the gospel and culture were many times indistinguishable one from another, and Christian bearers of good news became, in effect, "partners in genocide."³² For the inhabitants of the Atlantic coast, that partner was the Moravian Church. In 1849, Moravian missionaries arrived in Nicaragua to work with the much larger Miskitu population to the north.³³ Subsequently they evangelized the Rama living on Rama Cay, an island in the Bluefields Lagoon. In 1859, the missionaries established residence on an island nearby now known as Mission Cay. They may have come as bearers of "good news" but with devastating impact on indigenous culture. Their arrival initiated:

a large-scale decline of the Rama language, as it became replaced by Creole English. The profound cultural and psychological changes that accompanied acculturation at the hands of the missionaries are hard to imagine. Among the changes... were the acquisition of a negative ethnic identity.... In the process of conversion the Rama were made to perceive their previous state as filthy and wild.³⁴ Today only a few older individuals speak the language at all, and despite a few valiant efforts to rescue it, the Rama tongue is "nearly extinct."³⁵

³¹ Tinker, 4.

³² Tinker, 4.

³³ Board of World Mission of the Moravian Church, North America, accessed September 11, 2015, <http://moravianmission.org/partners/nicaragua>. The first missionaries known to have reached the Rama people were Moravian, who established a mission on Rama Cay, an island in the Bluefields Lagoon where many have lived for centuries. Today, most Rama consider themselves to be members of the Moravian Church.

³⁴ Mueller, 19.

³⁵ Paul M. Lewis, et al., eds., *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 17th ed., (Dallas: SIL International, 2014), accessed April 1, 2016, <https://www.ethnologue.com/product/19-Report-NI>. This publication limits the Rama population to Rama Cay, and estimates the population to be 900. However, people have reported that the principal population that still speaks Rama is located at *Punta de Agila*. In the Indian River community, there are also a few native speakers, including Hilario McCrea John and an uncle.

Despite laws guaranteeing the autonomy of indigenous people, events of the last several years reflect a continuing, blatant disregard for the rights of the Indian. As mentioned previously, in 2004 Ortega announced plans for a “dry canal,” an inter-coastal railway, signaling yet another outbreak of Canal Fever. The Atlantic seaport for the railway would be built on Rama territory, and it would cross through Rama lands. Since then, the scope of the project has mushroomed to include an interoceanic waterway—the *Gran Canal*³⁶—which is to be wider, deeper, and quadruple the length of the Panama Canal.³⁷ The Hong Kong Nicaraguan Development Company (HKND) has been contracted to undertake this mega-project, and the concession grants HKND exclusive rights to build hotels, industrial centers, a rail system, and an oil pipeline. *It also grants the Chinese company the right to expropriate land and natural resources along its route.* A ground-breaking ceremony was held in 2014, and once again, the lives of the Rama, and what remains of their culture and way of life, are in jeopardy.

If the *Gran Canal* project is not soon halted, it will destroy large portions of the virgin rainforest that the Rama have protected for two thousand years. It could literally destroy what remains of their indigenous way of life. There has been talk that the indigenous people would once again take up arms, for as Hilario has said, “without the land, an Indian is not an Indian.”

³⁶ For map of proposed route, see Appendix E.

³⁷ “Construction of Nicaragua Canal Threatens Indigenous Lives and Livelihoods,” *Cultural Survival*, June 25, 2015, accessed February 15, 2017, <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/construction-nicaragua-canal-threatens-indigenous-lives>. A lack of transparency regarding the potential environmental impact has caught the attention of environmental protection groups, and the project is expected to displace thousands of people.

Taking into account past history as well as current events, a brief sampling of which has been recounted above, the desperate, fragile state of affairs of the Rama people should be of *no* surprise to anyone. What is surprising is that, as an ethnic people distinct from the majority culture, they are still standing! However, it is evident that a steady erosion in favor of homogenization into the melting pot of the dominant culture is occurring. Much has been lost, and especially as older generations die, the demise of Rama culture could be complete in a matter of decades, unless this downward spiral is arrested.

Memories of *indigenous* Rama traditions are dim at best. This became particularly evident during one-on-one interviews, which were conducted in order to identify cultural and religious traditions that the older people could remember from previous life on Rama Cay. The most frequently mentioned custom was the “harvest festival.” Celebrated in November, the customs are similar to the harvest festival that North Americans call Thanksgiving Day, except that instead of turkey on a platter the table is set with manatee. These traditions, including the language they have adopted albeit by force, are in fact imported ones. They are Rama traditions in that they claim them as their own, and because they are distinct when compared to the dominant Latino culture.

Genesis of the Indian River Church Project

On that first trip that I had made to San Juan de Nicaragua in 2008, Hilario took Carlos and I in his dug-out canoe, propelled by a 15-horsepower motor, on a three-hour ride up the Indian River deep into the dense, virgin rainforest that is their ancestral home. He showed us a small, level piece of land which he had cleared close to his home,

overlooking a steep bank to the crystal waters of the river below. This is where he hoped to build a church for his people, he said, so they could worship and “maybe see miracles in their lives.” His dream is that they would have a better life, and he connects that with following Christ.

There is a pastor from Bluefields (a small city a considerable distance to the north) that comes once a year to perform weddings and baptisms. Hilario was hoping, though, that a missionary would live among them and teach them. My knee-jerk reaction was to respond with: “be careful of the missionaries, including me. Some ‘confuse’ the gospel with their own culture. None of them will understand your people like you do.” I sensed even then that God would call him as pastor. His love for his people, his passion for them to have a better life, and his willingness to sacrifice everything for that to be possible, were obvious. However, at the time he could not perceive himself as being qualified for such a sacred task. God would need to break through that self-conception before he could hear and respond to that call, and that would take a few more years.

On one of my many subsequent visits, I accompanied Hilario and his wife Doris, as well as an elderly couple, to a Wednesday-evening worship service in a Spanish-language Pentecostal “oneness”³⁸ church. The congregation was in the middle of a fundraising campaign. A guest preacher shared the story of a widow who had given all that she had to the temple treasury (Mk 12:41-44), and from that he extrapolated the need for the entire congregation to participate in a fasting-and-tithing campaign.

³⁸ A “oneness” church does not ascribe to the doctrine of the Trinity. A distinctive feature is that baptism is performed in the name of Jesus only (and not in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

Sometimes it is a blessing to not know what is being said, for the elderly couple who had accompanied us spoke only limited Spanish. As an invited guest, it was not my place to criticize, so I kept quiet. Then Hilario asked me what I thought of the service. “It was nice,” I replied. He kept looking at me, as if expecting me say more, so I continued: “I just wish that the preacher had read the verses which precede the story of the widow’s offering, where Jesus criticizes church leaders for devouring widows’ houses. It reads a little differently if you put the two sections together.”

My comments led to his request that I preach on the same biblical text the next night, in his home. He invited his neighbors, and about fifteen people came. After the sermon, I asked if anyone had questions. The floodgates opened. Is it correct to baptize infants? Is it a sin to start going to another church? Should Christians worship on Saturday or Sunday? Do women have to wear long sleeves in church? Mostly illiterate, they had assumed that those who came to share good news would bring clarity to their search for truth. Instead, a yoke of confusion had been placed on them.

A little more than two years ago, Hilario and I were *en route* to the far end of town, about a twenty-minute walk on the grid of elevated pathways that are the closest thing to roads in the village. He recounted that some of the “Spanish” churches in the village want him to serve as translator for them to the Rama. He tries to encourage his people to go to church, he says, but they complain that they do not understand what goes on. Speaking Spanish is only a recent development for many. The children learn it in public schools, and many of the adults have acquired it by exposure to the majority population, but it is not their first language. “They speak too fast, so our people do not want to go.”

For years Hilario and others had hoped to return to the rainforest, longing for their old way of life, but that hope now seems dim. His efforts to build a church further up river on the piece of land he showed us during our first visit were unsuccessful. Many Rama families had once lived up there just a few years ago, but slowly they have migrated to the village of San Juan de Nicaragua, so that their children could attend school, and because of restrictions on their subsistence activities of hunting, fishing, and planting crops in the rainforest.

The designation of their ancestral lands as a biological reserve, the *Reserva Biológica Río Indio-Maíz*, places the territory under the jurisdiction of MARENA (*Ministerio del Ambiente y Recursos Naturales* or Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources), in charge of protecting its natural resources. Of course, the Rama had already been doing this as a way of life—the reason why there still is a rainforest.

Because their ancestral lands are now classified as a biological reserve, if a Rama family wishes to build a house, they must apply for a permit and pay a fee to cut a tree on their own land. It appears to be a coin toss as to whether the permit is approved. Nonetheless, the same government periodically authorizes large-scale cutting of timber on the land, neither obtaining permission from or providing compensation to the Rama people.

I commented to Hilario, “it does not look like a return to the forest is anywhere closer than it was five years ago when you first took us up there.” He agreed. So I asked, “if that is the case, then what is your vision for the people? What do you think God is calling you to do?” He stood still, reflected for a moment, and replied, “I think God wants us to build a church right here in San Juan de Nicaragua. And, if my people want me to—

and if you will be my professor—I will be their pastor.” He had received that holy nudge, which set in motion plans to work alongside the Rama people, so that they could establish a church of their own.

A Church Building: The “Easy” Part

Although the construction phase is not the focus of this project, what has occurred to date in the process illustrates the challenges that one might encounter in under-developed parts of the world, in this case, “occupied” Nicaragua. It also serves as a reminder of how the very people who are the intended beneficiaries of assistance sometimes, to their own detriment, mount a resistance. An awareness of the long history of exploitation and oppression helps to maintain a proper perspective.

Naturally, the fundraising fell to SIGA. To date we have not encountered much difficulty in raising funds for specific projects, so I was not worried, since I was convinced that this is what God had planned, and God has at his disposition the financial resources of the world. He would nudge his people into giving. Indeed, churches and individuals have been responsive and very generous, and in a matter of months we had the needed funds. The process of acquiring land and securing permission to build was another matter entirely. More than once I wanted to abandon the project; it was only the prospect of disappointing people who had already seen so many promises made and broken, especially Hilario who had demonstrated determination, boldness and faith, that caused me not to do so.

After our conversation regarding the need for a church in San Juan de Nicaragua, Hilario and his wife Doris offered to dismantle his home and relocate it to a corner of

their lot. This, according to Hilario, would avoid governmental meddling, because it is his land. We formulated a plan to build a small wooden structure where worship could be held. Later, however, I counseled against this, because the church would be seen as “Hilario’s church” and not the church of the people. It would also not allow for growth or for other community activities to take place there. This initial plan was placed on hold, although Hilario’s words about meddling would prove to be prophetic.

The Rama community government (a federally-recognized entity that represents the people) writes a letter to the municipal government requesting permission to build a church on a lot of land that had been previously set aside for the Rama community. Technically, the land already belongs to the Rama, but the municipality, which has claimed jurisdiction over San Juan de Nicaragua since the abandonment of Greytown, controls it. Ignoring this small fact, the people are pleased when the mayor assures Rama leaders that, after Christmas recess, the required paperwork would be executed. New Year comes, then January, February, and March. It is not unusual for things to move slowly in Latin America, though, so no one is too concerned. Then word comes that the municipal council had changed its mind and would not deed over the property.

From this point forward, the situation becomes more complicated. The vice-mayor informs Rama leaders that the church project could still move forward, on the condition that the vice-mayor’s office is in charge of it, meaning that the vice-mayor would control the funds. Hilario calls me at my home in Costa Rica to tell me, to which I replied that SIGA is a Christian ministry, the church is a Christian project, and the construction project should be run by Christians not the government. Authorize the land or not, but SIGA would not hand over funds to the government.

After months of silence, another call. The newly-elected leadership of the Rama community government feel that they, the official Rama leaders, should manage the project. My answer was the same; the Rama community government is not a Christian organization, and the church needs to be built by Christians.

A pattern had emerged. When the first lot had been promised to the Rama, there was little expectation that they would ever be able to get funding to actually build a church. Then when it became known that SIGA would help to raise funds, the prospect of real money being available to accomplish the task became more probable. Factions were vying for control of the money.

Once again, I considered cancelling the project. The money could be applied to other projects that SIGA has waiting in the wings. However, as long as Hilario and other key Rama leaders continued to fight, we would keep hoping. We decide on a different approach. “If God wants us to build a church,” I say, “then it will happen. God does not need government handouts. If we find land for sale, I believe God will help us to raise additional funds with which to buy it. We need God. We don’t need the government.” Hilario begins to look for land to purchase. In an isolated town where economic opportunities are extremely scarce, most houses have been built on lots which were given to the people by the municipal government. A lot should be inexpensive; it is a “buyer’s market.” Indeed, there were several who were interested in selling.

A house was for sale. The wooden structure had been vacant for several years, and was showing signs of decay. The lot was centrally located, and large enough to accommodate more than one project, including a small playground and medicinal garden. The house could be fixed up for use as a church. It all looked promising. Hilario

telephones the owner, who yes, is willing to sell. However, in this region, there exist two price structures: the local price and the “gringo” price. The owner knows that the Rama have no money, so if they were to buy something, it would be with donated funds. He sets the price at \$32,000, more than twice its value. The original plan of building on Hilario and Doris’s lot was beginning to look like the best prospect after all.

We decide that I should personally manage the money. First, there is no bank, so someone would literally need to sleep with the money under their pillow, which also puts them and their family at risk for robbery. Second, it would remove what appears to have been the root cause of factions competing for control, and third, it would protect the church leaders from false accusations. It leaves me with the prospect of traveling, usually alone, on a public boat, with large quantities of money in my pockets, but it seemed like the only way to resolve the matter.

After a few more failed attempts at purchasing lots due to inflated prices, we had come full circle, back to the plan where Hilario and Doris dismantle their home and rebuild it on another corner of their lot. Then news arrives that the mayor once again has agreed to sign a deed for land upon which we could build a church. It is a good location, a nice-sized lot, and it would be a simple matter of the Rama community government requesting the land for the purpose of building a church.

The Rama community government would meet with us to discuss the letter. The meeting place and time are set. Hilario, a few others, and myself are there, but no one from the Rama community government shows up. Nothing ever starts on time, so we wait. Finally, one official arrives, and very politely but exuding an air of authority, he begins to question me. He said that he had only “just heard” of the project (which was

impossible) and asked me to explain it. He appeared to be on a fishing expedition. “How can we know that you have money to do it?” he asks. I simply said, “if we don’t have enough money to build it, the community will have a half-built church, but it will not have cost the community anything.” Hilario and two others present at that meeting *did* know how much money we had, but we had agreed not to disclose the amount.

It was late November 2014, the government shuts down early in December, and nothing would happen until January at the earliest. Of course we had come this far before, and by now, we had lost patience with the process. We did not trust the community leaders to write the letter, and we did not trust the government to issue the paperwork. Having run into multiple dead ends in our attempts to purchase a lot at a reasonable price, we concluded that building on Hilario’s lot was the only viable option. I head for my home on the Sarapiquí.

In mid-January, Hilario calls. The paperwork will be signed at the next municipal council meeting, and I should come to San Juan de Nicaragua. This time, I was not expecting that we would accomplish *anything*, but upon my arrival, I am told that the documents had *already* been signed. We could begin construction! I left some money for materials. I had not traveled with much, because I was not going to leave money for a building project that had no place where to be built, and I never feel comfortable carrying too much cash around with me, but I did have enough to start making concrete block.

Getting construction under way may not have been as simple a project as we had expected, but ironically, when the deed to the land finally was issued, it was *not* issued to the Rama community government, which is what we had anticipated. Quite surprisingly, it had been issued to SIGA Ministry Partners. The name of our ministry had not been

involved in the request, nor had it appeared in any the documents. We had never met personally with the mayor, vice-mayor, or any other Nicaraguan official. We had been trying to remain discreetly behind the scenes, and except for that meeting with the one Rama official, the face-to-face battles were fought by Hilario and others.

How it happened that title was granted to our ministry is somewhat of a mystery, except to guess that the mayor was aware that competing groups were vying for control, and decided that the best way to wash his hands of the matter was to deed it to SIGA. Of course, now we own property in Nicaragua—without wanting to—and this creates another dilemma. We do not want the church to be perceived as belonging to anyone other than the Rama people. However, for the short term, it may help to minimize potential conflicts. After the church is established, with a leadership team in place, we will deed it over to them. For the church to be truly a community church, it needs to be owned, and run, by the community.

The genesis of the church project was two years ago, the seed planted by Hilario's desire for his people to have a better life, and his acceptance of the call that God has extended to him to serve as pastor. This epiphany was followed by two years of frustration, disillusionment, and doubt about bringing the “easy” part to fruition. If the construction phase is indeed the easy part, then turbulent waters lie ahead. We hope and pray that this is not the case.

Construction began in February 2016, and we are optimistic that most of the hurdles are behind us. Meanwhile, we consider how to do church in a multi-cultural (Native American, African Creole, and Latino), multi-lingual (English, Rama-Kriol, Rama, and Spanish) setting. This is work that will extend well beyond 2017. For the

purposes of this research project, the focus is on just one element of a multi-faceted church planting project—the preparation for ministry of Hilario in terms of an introductory course in hermeneutics and a practical course in homiletics—the foundation for a contextually-appropriate ministry of sound teaching and preaching directed at rescuing a people from their spiritual poverty so they can be the people that God created them to be, honoring their culture and heritage, with the faith and hope that God will not only save them from cultural extinction but show them the way to a better life.

Focus of Thesis Project Plan

SIGA's ministry among the people known as Rama in Nicaragua is long term and multi-faceted. In all, the ultimate goal is to encourage them in their faith walk with Jesus Christ. Jesus' name must be proclaimed in a holistic manner, implicitly through social and pastoral ministries, and explicitly through the proclamation of the Word (Jn 1:1).

Preaching, therefore, is the focus of this thesis project: encouraging and equipping the pastor of the Indian River Indigenous Church for the ministry of preaching. Preaching is a sacred ministry that is best left for one of them to do, rather than risk perpetuating a dependency on outsiders who may do them harm, even if their intentions, like mine, are well meaning. My role therefore, is limited to that of equipping and encouraging, mostly from behind the scenes. This task will be approached, not from the perspective of preaching *techniques* but from the need for the preached message to be faithful to Holy Scripture and to the people who need to hear a word from God. Thus, an introductory

course on the exegetical-hermeneutical process will be emphasized as integral to the ministry preaching.

A call to serve is indeed a call to prepare, and preparation is a lifelong process. Obviously, it would be impossible to teach Hilario even the essentials, however one defines them, in a six-month period of time. It poses a particular challenge when working with people whose experience in an academic setting is next to none, as the entire process becomes intimidating and overwhelming to the point that the student is unlikely to synthesize “data” in a meaningful way when compared to someone with previous academic preparation.

Compounding the difficulties presented by the lack of academic experience are cultural differences regarding means of effective communication, particularly in a culture that has traditionally relied on oral methods (this tradition is rapidly disappearing, which partly explains the loss of their own history in their collective consciousness). For a person like myself who is hopelessly tied to the printed (and electronic) word, this presents a particular challenge, and one that makes me a student of the process as much as “professor” of the content. Discovering the most effective *means* of communication in terms of delivering content and also in helping him find his voice in the pulpit, will be a truly experimental aspect of thesis project—at least for me. In that sense, developing *content* requires my academic training; developing the *means* for content delivery is where I become the student.

Hilario and I will attempt various approaches and evaluate the effectiveness of each. Evaluation, due to the lack of academic training, will not take place in a traditional way; there will be no essays or final exams. Rather, it will be based upon verbal and non-

verbal feedback that is obtained through conversation with Hilario collaboratively, as equal partners in the process.

II. THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Christians turn to the Bible for spiritual nourishment and guidance, yet the book itself is a source of heated controversy even among believers. Doctrinal theses are nailed to the church door, posted on the Internet, and wars *about* the Bible are waged—over what one believes or does not believe *about* the Bible. Is it to be interpreted literally, or not? Is there room for alternatives in interpretation or not? This chapter begins with an explanation of my understanding as to what this holy book is—and is not—because of the hermeneutical implications for the theological discussion in this chapter.

For the Christian, the Bible is a central formative influence. However, it is *alongside*, not instead of, other authorities:

In Christian ethics the Bible is always primary but never self-sufficient. It can never be the sole source of authoritative influence in the shaping of Christian character and conduct... Thus, for Christian ethics its authority is inescapable without being absolute.¹

The so-called “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” is an acknowledgement of this reality. John Wesley identified not only the Bible, but also tradition, reason, and experience as major sources of Christian authority. When there are conflicts between these authorities, the Bible wins, but not automatically, for the problem just might lie in the *interpretation* of Scripture.

We ought to tread carefully with our biblical hermeneutics. The Bible has not been around nearly as long as God has, and Adam and Eve knew nothing about it. We are only just now beginning to scratch the surface as to its depth, breadth, and richness. There

¹ Bruce C. Birch and Larry L. Rasmussen, *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and the Christian Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 34.

is one thing that ought to “go without saying,” but evidently is not the case: The Bible is not a weapon with which to bludgeon a fellow believer, or any other human being. Neither is it to be used as tool to *preserve the status quo*; unleashed, the Bible frequently turns the status quo on its head.

The sciences of biblical criticism and hermeneutics are still in their adolescence, relative to the number of years that have passed since the establishment of the biblical canon. We see through a glass, darkly, and know, only in part (1Cor 13:12). Scientific discoveries continue to illumine our attempts at biblical interpretation. This is all very humbling; science is not a threat. The relevancy of the Bible as we continue a long tradition of reinterpretation does not diminish at all; it is infinitely more enriched.

The Bible still inspires, still breathes life and hope into contemporary contexts in a diverse world. To attempt to control and contain the Bible does violence to it. It is *eisegesis*² of the worst kind, because it denies the living God who is not subordinate to the Bible and whose Holy Spirit still blows whenever and wherever he chooses.

Furthermore:

The canon does not speak in a single voice. This is both a witness to the variety of experience with God and a corrective to warn us against absolutizing any selection of the voices through which Scripture speaks. That the biblical communities themselves can be seen judging and reinterpreting and measuring the tradition against their own experience of God can be read as a support for similar activity on our part.³

If we are to be faithful to the biblical witness, we also should approach Scripture with an open mind, discerning heart, and willingness to reinterpret it within new contexts. Without attempting to parse adjectives such as “inerrant,” the Bible—all of it—is to be

² Meaning, generally, reading into Scripture what the reader wants it to say.

³ Birch, 44.

revered, respected, and studied. We learn about who God is by hearing anew the old, old stories. We learn our way to him. We discover that we belong to him. The Bible is beautiful, it is divinely inspired, but the Bible is not God, and to believe otherwise is idolatrous. When God said, “thou shalt not have any other gods before me,” he meant it.

The Bible, in both the First Testament and the New, holds human beings accountable as “moral agents,” which encompasses both our “character and conduct, our being and our doing.”⁴ The Bible speaks with authority, but it is not authoritarian. Nor is it static, because it is God-breathed and God is still breathing!

With that said, focus will now turn to the theological implications of two biblical themes, one each from the Hebrew and Christian testaments. From the Old, a study of the Sabbath command and from the New, the message of freedom and equality as found in Paul’s epistle to the Galatians. In both instances the scope is universal. It is relevant to those who serve in ministry everywhere, but especially to those who serve cross-culturally in fragile settings among vulnerable people such as the colonized Rama of the Indian River community living in occupied Nicaragua.

These two exegetical exercises are relevant to the immediate task of this thesis project, that of finding effective methods to deliver sound theological education to those without access to traditional means; particularly ministers of minimal academic skills, very limited literacy, and who in some cases are illiterate altogether. Despite these obstacles, these ministers feel called to serve, and what they teach and preach affects the lives of many, for good or for bad. For the Rama, not only is their spiritual well-being at stake, so also is their ethnic and cultural identity.

⁴ Birch, 31.

The controversies addressed by Paul in his letter are directly relevant to cross-cultural ministry and the missionary enterprise; the Sabbath command is evaluated both as a sign of hope to the poor, marginalized, and oppressed, as well as an antidote to disunity and dysfunction within the church, which distracts her from her divine mission in the world. While there are many other very relevant theological topics to discuss, particularly in the context of cross-cultural ministry (money, poverty, proclamation, for example), those will be addressed in the Literature Review chapter, as interaction with contemporary literature regarding those topics will be extensive.

Galatians Throughout the Ages

Paul's epistle to the churches in Galatia has garnered considerable scholarly attention throughout the ages. For Augustine (4th Century CE), freedom was the fulfillment of the Law, the problem being not one of observing Jewish customs but in believing that "without [them] they cannot achieve salvation," in which case they "forfeit Christ."⁵

Thomas Aquinas (13th Century CE) believed that Galatians "excluded superfluous sacraments against those who wish to add the ancient sacraments to new ones."⁶ The "central concern [is] with the way in which the believer is transformed in the church by grace."⁷

For Martin Luther, ordained as a Roman Catholic priest in 1507, Paul's letter to the Galatians provided the "fruit of his struggle for an evangelical understanding of

⁵ John Riches, *Galatians Through the Centuries*, (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 248.

⁶ Jean Pierre Torrell, in Riches, 27.

⁷ Riches, 25.

Paul's letter,"⁸ resulting in a "Law-free Gospel of justification by faith, with its emphasis on the Christian's faith as solely responsible" for a person's salvation.⁹ For Luther, Paul's prohibition of circumcision among the gentiles represents a blanket condemnation of:

doctrines, works, religions and ceremonies ... Whosoever teach that there is anything necessary to salvation (whether they be Papists, Turks, Jews, or Sectaries) beside faith in Christ, or observe any rule, tradition, or ceremony whatsoever, with this opinion that by such things they shall obtain forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and everlasting life; they hear in this place the sentence of the Holy Ghost pronounced against them by the Apostle, that Christ profiteth them nothing at all.¹⁰

Embroided in his own life-and-death struggle with the Vatican, Luther "filtered his own experience of conversion and subsequent persecution" through Paul's letter to the Galatians, while virtually ignoring the immediate context of the letter itself.¹¹ This did not stop him, however, from turning an accusing finger outwardly toward the Anabaptists, appropriating Paul's discourse on freedom in chapter 5 to do so:

[T]he liberty which Paul preaches is not a civil or political liberty, nor a 'fleshly, or rather a devilish liberty' whereby people 'obey neither God nor laws, but do what they wish' *as do the Anabaptists* who 'at liberty in their opinions and in all their doings, to the end they may teach and do whatsoever they dream to be right, without reprehension.'¹²

A generation following Luther, Jean Calvin¹³ interpreted the dispute in Galatia as one regarding the observance of religious ceremonies: Paul is protesting the observance

⁸ Riches, 28.

⁹ Riches, 29.

¹⁰ Martin Luther, in Riches, 252.

¹¹ Luther, in Riches, 253.

¹² Luther, in Riches, 252.

¹³ Whenever possible, names are kept to their original form, rather than the anglicized version.

of ceremonial law as being contrary to the gospel.¹⁴ Except for the Lord's Supper and the rite of baptism, all other ceremonies are "ungodly absurdities."¹⁵

Suffice it to say that Paul's letter to Galatians has received considerable attention through the years, with the quality of *exegesis* being varied. Even for scholars such as Martin Luther, to whom the church is indebted for his prolific writing and bold interpretations utilizing the tools that were available him, it still is glaringly obvious how easily this Bible scholar's own prejudices led to seriously flawed hermeneutics. Luther might have moderated his tone if he had acknowledged his cultural and ethnic biases, especially regarding his disdain for everything and everyone Semite. If he had stopped to consider that:

The Palestine of Paul's time contained a bewildering number of diverse Jewish groups, factions, sects, and subsects. From Josephus we learn that there were what he called four philosophies within Judaism; the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Essenes, and the Fourth Philosophy (...guerrillas called Zealots). The Sadducees were the aristocrats and members of priestly families whose power centered on the Jerusalem Temple and who formed a large block within the Sanhédrin, the Jewish Parliament. ... The Pharisees were a lay party of 'Puritan' Judaists who developed an oral Torah from their teachings of the written Torah and who attempted to sanctify everyday life and live 'as if' they were priests. The Essenes ... were an apocalyptic party which interpreted the Torah allegorically and repudiated conventional Judaism The Zealots were militant, nationalistic 'freedom fighters' and revolutionaries whose aggressive militarism had as its aim the expulsion of Roman authority from Palestine.¹⁶

The Bible also mentions the Herodians (Matt 22:16, Mark 12:13), the followers of John the Baptist (Matt 11:2), as well as of course, the Jesus Party, known as "the Way" (Acts 9:2) before they were called "Christians" (Acts 11:26). All factions agreed on the

¹⁴ Riches, 38.

¹⁵ Jean Calvin, in Riches, 256.

¹⁶ John T. Greene, "Paul's Hermeneutic Versus Its Competitors," *The Journal of Religious Thought* 40, No. 1 (Spring-Summer 1983), 9-10.

centrality of the Torah, but parted ways when it came to theological interpretation and application. Each “peered into the written Torah and saw its own interpretive reflection.”¹⁷ Of course, Luther would have known that Jesus, his disciples, and the first Christians were all Jewish. If he had reflected on the implications of who “the Jews” of 1st Century Palestine really were, perhaps he would have reined in his inflammatory rhetoric and sweeping condemnations that centuries later helped fan the flames of anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany.¹⁸

What seems to have been missing is not a matter of neglecting the biblical text as much as a critical evaluation of Luther’s own cultural presuppositions and resulting prejudices that obscured his hermeneutics. If he had done so, he might have avoided his flawed *eisegesis* which caused him to condemn Judaism, Jewish society and its people. Luther repeated, in his own way, the same type of error against which Paul vehemently protested; that of the Jewish-Christian missionaries superimposing their own cultural norms on the gentile Galatian churches.

Like Luther, Paul of Tarsus, a male, Pharisaic Jew, had burst onto the scene with his bags packed full of self-righteous religiosity and cultural superiority, which fueled his zealous persecution of Christians in the early church. With all of the diversity within Judaism itself, much of it conflicting, it is a wonder the Paul did not persecute more groups, but he aimed his sights on eradicating the perceived scourge of the sect known as “the Way.” Until, that is, he met the founder of the Jesus Party on a road one day.

¹⁷ Greene, 10.

¹⁸ Martin Luther, “Jews and their Lies,” in Wiley, Tabitha, *Paul and the Gentile Women* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 30. Luther believed that “synagogues should be set on fire ... their homes likewise be broken down and destroyed ... deprived of their prayer books ... rabbis must be forbidden under penalty of death to teach ... so that you all may be free of this insufferable devilish burden—the Jews.”

Previously, Paul had been “zealous for the traditions of [his] ancestors” (Gal 1:14), but somewhere between Damascus and Galatia, Paul critically examined his home culture and was able to differentiate between it and the essentials of the Christian faith. In so doing, he carefully avoided the error of the Jewish-Christian missionaries, so naturally he was perturbed that they came behind him to “correct” matters.

Missionary Factions Among the Galatians

Paul consistently claimed apostolic authority, implying that it had been called into question on more than one occasion. However, he vigorously defended this self-identification in several of his letters, including the one to the churches of Galatia. Somewhat less obvious, because he fails to specifically claim the title in the way that he does “apostle,” is his self-placement within the prophetic tradition of ancient Israel:

[W]hen God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, and was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me ... (Gal 1:15).

This very closely follows the words that YHWH spoke to Jeremiah: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations” (Jer 1:5).¹⁹

Paul’s letter to the Galatians quickly reveals his concern that the churches which he had planted were being negatively influenced by ideas that threatened to erode the fundamentals that he had taught them. The situation was a “volatile mix, with competing

¹⁹ Susan Eastman, *Recovering Paul’s Mother Tongue: Language and Theology in Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007), 71. See also Isa 49:1.

evangelists citing different scriptural warrants and urging different conditions for Gentile inclusion in the people of Israel.”²⁰

The forcefulness of Paul’s letter reflects the severity of the matter. He accuses the Galatians of having been “bewitched” (3:1) into abandoning the message that he had preached to them in favor of “a different gospel” (1:6) presented by missionaries who had invaded their churches. They “sought to bring Gentile women and men properly into Israel, because salvation required belonging to the covenant.”²¹ The missionaries perceived Paul’s teachings to be incomplete. His letter sets out to correct the matter.

These Jewish-Christian missionaries were likely acting upon sincerely-held beliefs and not with malicious intent. They wanted the Galatians to embrace the tenets of Jesus’ religious and cultural roots. Theirs was the ‘full gospel,’ and it required all Christians to become part of the Mosaic covenant.²² From their perspective, for Gentiles to fully belong to the family of God, they needed to embrace Judaism. After all, they were followers of Jesus, and Jesus was an observant Jew.

Today, we would do well to avoid labeling these missionaries as troublemakers, even if the end result was just that. Rather, it is more useful to consider that their motives may have been well intended, albeit misguided. In any event, it is important to avoid a broad-brush condemnation of “the Jews” based upon the negative connotations of Paul’s words to the Galatians.

²⁰ Tabitha Wiley, *Paul and the Gentile Women* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 15.

²¹ Wiley, 73.

²² This was the central issue that resulted in an appeal to the apostles in Jerusalem, as reported in Acts, regarding the “Gentile problem.” The only requirement given was that the Gentiles “abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood (Acts 15:20).

Paul was called to be an apostle—and prophet—but his vocation was that of cross-cultural missionary. His ‘problem’ was with other missionaries. The fight for the soul of the Galatian churches, then, was a fight between conflicting factions of missionaries. This should serve as a warning to missionaries today—and to the churches who support them. There are also implications for missions societies, as well as for teams of church people seeking short-term mission immersion experiences, a more recent phenomenon. In addition to learning about the ‘target’ culture, it is equally important for those who serve cross-culturally, even for a brief time, to critically examine aspects of their own culture, so that, as much as possible, cultural norms might be distinguished from core religious beliefs. Failure to do this can lead to disastrous results on the mission field. That is what got the Jewish-Christian missionaries in trouble, and the results were devastating.

We can and should forgive “the Jews” who disturbed the spiritual lives of vulnerable people in Galatia. After all, those missionaries were well entrenched in Judaism, a religious tradition with deep roots. They were only beginning to find their way as Christ followers, and were venturing into somewhat uncharted waters, making mistakes, obviously, from which *perhaps* they eventually learned to improve their methods. On the other hand, the Bible does not tell us who won the tug of war between missionary Paul and the Jewish-Christian missionaries. Regardless of who won the battle, in the end, damage was done, and it is quite possible that the collateral damage permanently splintered the Galatian churches. “Sorry, I meant well,” is not enough.

Missionaries today do not deserve the benefit of the doubt being given here to the Jewish-Christian missionaries. We have the 20/20 hindsight of the biblical witness,

centuries of mission endeavors from which to learn, greater access to theological education, and to information regarding the cultural beliefs and practices of virtually every nation and tribe around the world. We will continue making mistakes, of course, but we ought not to continue making the *same* mistakes over and over again. “Sorry, I meant well,” is simply not enough.

With regard to the cultural genocide of indigenous peoples throughout the Americas during the colonial period, history certainly makes the case that the effects of the evangelization efforts of the European missionary movement, conveniently aligned with the conquering military powers, were devastating. It is a sin from which, for the most part, the church of the descendants of those invaders has yet to repent. For healing to take place, she must confess her sins of the past, *even when she might have had good intentions*, then repent and submit to a process of healing and reconciliation (this will be explored further in the concluding chapter). “Sorry, we meant well,” is simply not enough, and is not even always the truth.

The Euro-American church’s involvement in the cultural genocide of indigenous people is not all ancient history. In Canada, the last “government-funded, *church-run*” boarding school for First Nations²³ children closed its doors for good in 1996.²⁴ Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established in response to a class action

²³ Minister of Justice, “Indian Act,” last modified April 2, 2015, accessed April 6, 2017, <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/PDF/I-5.pdf>. The term frequently employed in Canada is “First Nations;” however, the Indian Act of Canada (amended April 2, 2015) uses “Indian” as the legal definition. It further classifies an Indian as “status” (registered) or “non-status” which has been particularly discriminatory against women. Furthermore, the Canadian *government* determines who can and cannot be a member of a Nation and not the First Nations people themselves. Accessed April 6, 2017.

²⁴ Cass Madden, “Shedding Light on Canada’s ‘Cultural Genocide’,” *Cultural Survival*, June 23, 2015, accessed July 3, 2016, www.culturalsurvival.org/news/shedding-light-canadas-cultural-genocide. Emphasis added.

lawsuit which sought reparations for former students. The Commission determined that the “schools were set up to eliminate parental involvement in the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual development” of the children, who also were “forbidden to speak their language and practice their own culture.”²⁵

From a well-known academic institution in the United States comes another recent example, and it is a gruesome one: “A book entitled *The History of Christianity*, bound in the flayed and tanned skin of a murdered American Indian,” was on public display in a glass case at a Christian school of theology from 1893 to 1974—a span of eighty-one years.²⁶ The book had been presented as a gift to the school “by a methodist minister.”²⁷ A note accompanying the display said: “This Latin church history book... is bound in American Indian skin. The Indian was killed in hand-to-hand combat by General David Morgan of Morgantown, West Virginia, on April 1, 1779.”²⁸ The book was finally removed from its display case, the skin separated from its cover, and the remains repatriated for a proper Indian burial, but only after a series of student protests pressured the administration into taking action.²⁹

That Christians of any denomination anywhere could ever have participated in such atrocities is unconscionable, but those two examples tell us that they—we—do. It

²⁵ Madden, “Shedding Light.”

²⁶ Tink Tinker, “Redskin, Tanned Hide: A Book of Christian History Bound in the Flayed Skin of an American Indian: The Colonial Romance, christian Denial and the Cleansing of a christian School of Theology,” *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion* 5, No. 9 (October 2014): 6. Tinker’s unconventional method of capitalization preserved.

²⁷ Tinker intentionally uses lower case letters for adjectives such as “methodist” “american” “european” and “christian,” while capitalizing words like “Whites” or “Indians.” This is to “avoid any unnecessary normativizing or universalizing of any principal euro-christian institutional political or religious category.” See n. 2.

²⁸ Tinker, 25.

²⁹ Tinker, 10.

might not have happened if they—we—were not so convinced of the superiority of Euro-American culture that little room is left for credible alternatives. It might not have happened if we would own our less-than-stellar history instead of trying to hide it, instead of perpetuating triumphal myths. No, we are not in a position to criticize those Jewish-Christian missionaries, but we are in a position to learn from their mistakes. That is, if we want to badly enough.

Freedom and Equality in Galatians

Equality among all members of the holy church catholic has implications for international missions and cross-cultural work, for racial reconciliation, as well as for the health and welfare of the local congregation, wherever she might be situated. The Apostle Paul, infamous for his words in other epistles which even today fuel divisions within the church regarding the role of women in ministry, had a lofty vision for the churches of Galatia in this regard, a matter of considerable relevance today.

In Galatians, abolitionists found encouragement and moral justification in their battle against the scourge of slavery. So do those with an egalitarian perspective regarding gender issues; most specifically, God's design for male and female and the role each is called to play in church and family, which by implication also includes the rest of society. The apostle wrote:

[I]n Christ Jesus you all are children of God through faith. As many of you were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:26-28)

Listen! I, Paul, am telling you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you. Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire law.... For in Christ

Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love (Gal 5:2-6).

Surely there would have been other aspects of converting to Judaism that the Jewish-Christian missionaries were preaching, such as keeping kosher, or the Sabbath, but Paul chooses to use circumcision as the focal point of his argument. This raises two questions:

1. Why is circumcision given such prominence in his argument with hardly a mention of other requirements of keeping the law, and
2. What could possibly motivate a person to willingly submit to this elective surgery?

As the Galatians were relatively new converts who once had been enslaved to pagan religions, it is understandable that they might have automatically assumed that the Jewish Christians would be more knowing in matters of faith. Paul could not have possibly taught them everything they needed to know, and since he was not there, they were open to hearing from these missionaries with Jewish credentials.

Even still, the fact remains that at least some of the Galatians were seeking circumcision to complement their previous Christian baptism. Circumcision is not something that one would typically submit to on impulse. Why then? Perhaps it is because the man, upon doing so, would gain a status within Judaism that a woman could never achieve. Circumcision would admit a male convert into a very exclusive club, allowing him to enter into the inner court of the Temple, symbolizing a closer proximity to God. It is a club which no woman could ever join, so there would be forever a hierarchical separation of men from women, and the order of that hierarchy is obvious.

Paul had established what had been by design an egalitarian fellowship between believers without distinction of race or ethnicity (Jew or Greek), social class (slave or free), or gender (male or female). By converting to Judaism, both male and female could overcome barriers of ethnicity and social status, but a woman could never cross the gender divide in order to become circumcised.

Viewed from this angle, the attraction that circumcision presented to Galatian *men* makes more sense. The Mosaic law imposes a separation between male and female that did not exist at Creation, and to his credit (especially considering other positions that have been attributed to him) Paul was determined that this separation would not exist in the fellowship among the churches in Galatia. Paul, the male, circumcised Jew who learned at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), would have none of that.

Thus, the primary battleground staked out for the soul of the churches of Galatia was one of status within the faith community based upon gender, and that battle continues among churches today. Granted, there are passages of Scripture, also purportedly written by the apostle, that appear to support the so-called complementarian movement. Organizations have cropped up which dedicate themselves to promoting this non-gospel.³⁰ They do so by ignoring much of the biblical witness, and by applying *eisegesis* to the neglect of sound *exegesis*.

Dominant forces seek to maintain power and status. This was true in the days of monarchies, of which the Vatican once was, it is true of dictatorships such as the Ortega and Castro regimes, it is true in Washington politics, it is evident in clashes between

³⁰ Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, "Mission and Vision," accessed April 10, 2016, <http://cbmw.org/about/mission-vision>. The mission of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (est. 1987) is "primarily to help the church defend against the accommodation of secular feminism."

dominant and emerging cultures in the United States of America, and sadly it is also very true in the church today. The church universal is still a male-dominated, male-centric force (and in North America a euro-male-centric force). Those who occupy positions of authority are determined to keep it that way. The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) is one contemporary example. Its mission is to

set forth the teachings of the Bible about the complementary differences between men and women, created equally in the image of God, because these teachings are essential for obedience to Scripture and for the health of the family and the church.... [the Council was established] primarily to help the church defend against the accommodation of secular feminism... an ideology that would later become known as evangelical feminism.... a significant departure from what the church had practiced from its beginning [and] reaches ultimately to the *heart of the gospel*.³¹

Fear of losing the privileges afforded by power, influence, and status causes human beings to resort to *eisegesis* at the expense of *exegesis*, resulting in ‘exit-Jesus.’ Even allowing for diversity in interpretations of Scripture (as is the case with multiple Jewish sects and the Torah), it is difficult to read such statements without hearing the frantic sound both of fear and fear mongering and a strong echo of the turmoil in the Galatian churches 2,000 years ago. Misguided Jewish-Christian missionaries felt it necessary to preserve the superior status of men. To have women on equal footing in church life was too radical an adjustment to make. God would never want equality to go *that far*; things might get out of hand.

Of course anatomy makes it clear that man and woman are indeed different, and the Bible teaches that husband and wife are complementary partners, as both are needed to more completely reflect God’s image in the world. The problem arises when a group of

³¹ Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, cbmw.org.

men, in this case mostly (but not exclusively) white Euro-American men, seek to define and dictate what those ‘complementarian’ (a buzzword meaning that a woman should not assume any role in the church or home that a man might want for himself) roles should be. In so doing, they impose upon both woman and man a yoke of slavery.

According to CBMW, “the Bible is being undermined and the *very words of God*” revised when “in hundreds of places... the words *he, him, his, brother, father, son, and man*” are replaced by gender-neutral vocabulary.³² Unless they actually believe that “there is none other name under heaven given among *men*, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12, KJV) really only refers to men, this is not even good scholarship:

A patriarchal society uses androcentric language to perpetuate its patriarchy; ... If, in usage, ‘man’ covers or is made to do for ‘woman,’ and ‘he’ covers and is made to do for ‘she,’ then ‘woman’ and ‘she’ are *assumed* to be secondary to ‘man’ and ‘he.’ The Greek word *anthropos* can refer to a male person. For example, ‘he saw a man [*anthropos*] called Matthew’ (Mt 9:9) [However], ‘it is also clear that in many contexts, and one might argue in *most* contexts, the word refers to a *human being*, a man or a woman, or, in the plural, to human beings.’ To continue to translate *anthropos* into masculine pronouns—at least where it is obvious that the translation is gender neutral—results in a *mistranslation* of the word *anthropos*.³³

Admittedly, correcting these mistranslations of *anthropos* creates a grammatical conundrum for the English language, as making a pronoun agree both in gender and number is not always possible, unless one resorts to a “he/she” or “she/he” formula, which is an awkward way to accomplish inclusivity, but it is more accurate than is translating a singular noun into a plural in order to avoid gender specificity. However, it should hardly be grammatical rules that dictate Bible translation.

³² Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, cbmw.org.

³³ Burton Throckmorton, “Language and the Bible,” *Religious Education* 80, No. 4 (Fall 1985): 530.

My Christian parents demonstrated to their children what complementarianism really is. They put each other first without attempting to define one another. They made decisions together. They showed how loving God and loving neighbor transforms society. They raised their children in the love and knowledge of the Lord, creating an environment of *shalom* for our family. Thankfully, neither tried to place a gender-based yoke of slavery upon us. If they had, I might have believed them because they were the authority. If they had, I might have missed that still, small voice calling me to move to Central America and love his people. I certainly would not be preaching and teaching among them, because God would never call a woman to do that.

A little girl, even if told that the word “men” also includes her, is being subtly conditioned to accept her own invisibility. That is less so in society anymore, as women serve as doctors, physicists, astronauts, and CEOs. They become senators, professional athletes, presidents and prime ministers. How then, can the church tell her children (little boys are hurt just as much as little girls by this) that in society, both boys and girls can achieve anything, but in church, God wants the girls to be silent? How can the church teach her about her spiritual gifts, that God gives to her as he chooses, that they are to be used for the common good, that they can even be used by God to change the world, but in church she must hide her light under a bushel? *Where is the good news* in this for roughly one-half of the human population?

This is not something easily brushed aside by simply labeling it as a cultural matter. It really *does* reach at the heart of the gospel, as cultural preferences disguised as gospel are propagated in seminaries and churches, which in turn produce missionaries who go to serve among fragile groups such as the Rama. To teach them that

complementarianism is “essential for obedience to Scripture” and that it “reaches ultimately to the heart of the gospel”³⁴ amounts to preaching a different gospel, which is really no gospel at all.

Fortunately, Rama culture is relatively egalitarian; Rama women already serve in top leadership positions in the community and territorial governments. They are culturally predisposed to egalitarianism, but even so could be susceptible to the errors of the Jewish-Christian missionaries or complementarian *male* authorities, simply because they realize that they are uneducated regarding theological doctrine, mostly illiterate and therefore unable to read the Bible, and are eager to learn from the so-called experts.

The struggle for power and dominion continues wherever power is well entrenched in the hands of a few, both inside and outside ecclesial institutions, thus creating an unequal stratification of society based on economic resources, race, gender, religion, and other factors. Instead of perpetuating the status quo, the church should be working as God’s agent to break down the structures that prevent all of Creation from experiencing *shalom*.

The Cosmic Vision of the Sabbath

The world that God created and declared to be “good” in many respects still is, but it has deteriorated into one of injustice, pain, and suffering. Harmony among God’s image-bearers has been disrupted. Unjust social structures created by sinful humankind have distorted God’s design. The *missio dei* is to “reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood” of Jesus Christ (Col 1:20), restoring

³⁴ Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, cbmw.org.

Creation to its former perfection. It is God's will that his perfect kingdom be made present on earth, *as it is in heaven*. From the Lord's Prayer, we also can derive the essence of the *missio ekklesia*—to act as God's agent of reconciliation in the world. These are spiritual concerns with ethical, even cosmic, implications.

The Sabbath command serves as a reminder as to how things once were in the world. It offers a glimpse of how they are in heaven and therefore *should* be on earth, while also acknowledging the current reality—or there would be no need for the commandment. It is a prospective vision of what God's kingdom looks like. Even if Sabbath observances only temporarily and partly restore God's design, every seven days we are reminded of how God wants us to relate to him, to one another, and to all of Creation:

Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it (Exod 20:8-11).

When God spoke the words that transformed chaos into order, there were no slaves, no oppression, no destruction, and no poisoning of the environment. The world that God had intended for us to live in, to care for, and to enjoy while basking in his holy presence, was a world where all created beings experienced *shalom*. Then sin entered the world through the door of the human heart, a painful reality that is impossible to deny. This was not God's original plan, though, and the biblical witness tells us that God still intends to see that harmony restored.

God provides us with a peek into his cosmic vision for the future, where justice is for all, equality is restored, where wars cease, and where even the beasts of burden and

the land from which comes our sustenance experience *shalom*, where *all nature sings and around me rings the music of the spheres*. That glimpse is best seen by honoring the command to “remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.” There is to be one day a week that is unlike the rest; in fact, it is a day of rest. It is a day that glimmers brightly in comparison to the other six.

Inherent in the command is a recognition that inequality defines human relationships, that some people enslave and exploit the vulnerability of others, that fleeing refugees seek shelter and safety far from their homes, and that even the animals suffer. That is humankind’s creation. God asks—demands, really—that we “remember” the Sabbath, which provides us with badly-needed rest, but also a preview of coming attractions. Sabbath observance is a here-and-now command with future implications. Here and now, God gives us the Sabbath so that we might, while keeping it holy, reflect on ways we can incorporate that future vision into the present—into the other six days of the week.

In North America, a particularly individualistic culture, Sabbath keeping is often interpreted in terms of the individual: “I work hard and need a day off.” The Protestant Work Ethic has run amok, and people lead over-stressed, over-scheduled lives. For the individual, Sabbath day observance offers a remedy for workaholism and the other ‘isms’ that plague us. The Sabbath is about the “gift of freedom from unceasing work” for everyone and it is about self-liberation from “unhealthy, even idolatrous, patterns of work and life,”³⁵ but not just for ourselves. It is for all of Creation.

³⁵ Bryan P. Stone and Claire E. Wolfeich, *Sabbath in the City: Sustaining Urban Pastoral Excellence* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 40.

That Sabbath observance is a practice that “embodies and rediscovers right understanding of God as creator, our own identity as created beings”³⁶ is only part of the equation. God desires that all of Creation—the slave, the servant, the child, the stranger, even the ox and the donkey – experience *shalom*. As they once did before sin entered the world, God wants them to experience it here and now on the Sabbath. Thus, as we reflect on this cosmic vision, past and future but also partially present in the here and now, it ought to provoke within us a concern for those who still are prevented from experiencing it.

Sabbath observance was central to the preservation of the cultural and religious identity of the ancient Israelites and continues to be a central practice within Judaism today; it is “the mark of Jewish identity, and even the preserver of the Jewish people amidst the loss of the temple.”³⁷ By keeping the Sabbath, the Israelites were reminded of who they were and where they came from. Within the contexts of exile and foreign domination, the Sabbath was also a subversive political message to the occupying forces. The Israelites may have been conquered by the Babylonians, Persians, or whomever, each of whom would have superimposed upon them their own deities, festivals, customs, and laws, but every seven days the Sabbath proclaimed that Israel’s ultimate allegiance was to YHWH.

As important as Sabbath keeping still is to Judaism, it is for everyone: “On the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested.... So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done

³⁶ Stone, 40.

³⁷ Stone, 40.

in creation” (Gen 2:2-3). The Sabbath was part of God’s creative action from the beginning of time, before Israel was called out of Egypt; even before Abraham. In both the Exodus and Deuteronomy accounts,

[t]wo themes emerge as central motifs – creation and liberation. The first emphasizes Sabbath as a time of awed respect for God as creator and for the wonder of the created world, as an imitation of the divine rhythm of creation and rest, work and Sabbath.

....

The second theme emphasizes the liberative gift of Sabbath. Sabbath observance recalls Yahweh’s liberation of the Jewish people from slavery.³⁸

Creation is the explanation given for the Sabbath at Sinai, thereby including the blessed, consecrated, Sabbath as an integral part of God’s creative activity, while also drawing a distinct parallel between six days of human labor and resting and remembering. Even in the Exodus account, the theme of liberation is present, because it includes children, slaves, livestock, and foreigners. However, at this point in time, “the morning of the third day” (Exod 19:16), the Israelites needed no reminder of the suffering that accompanies being on the bottom rung of the ladder of society. They would have located themselves in that list. They had not yet entered the Promised Land, and yet they are being commanded to allow the “alien resident” to enjoy the Sabbath as well. They had been alien residents in Egypt. Yes, they would have understood the Sabbath as a liberating event without further explanation.

Fast forward forty years (Deut 1:3). The Israelites were now “as numerous as the stars of heaven” (1:9) and many miles stood between them and their former captors in Egypt. Years pass; memories fade. The younger generations had no memory of crossing

³⁸ Stone, 40-41.

the floor of the Red Sea on foot. They would not have known what it was like to be someone's slave. So the Sabbath command is repeated, as is the list of who is included, but the reason for remembering changes. "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day" (5:15). Although Creation is not specified in this updated interpretation, it still is there, for who else could have summoned the forces of nature against Egypt, and have parted the waters of the sea so that his people could cross over to freedom? Only the Creator himself.

This brief comparison between the two Sabbath commands reflects how hermeneutics is contextual. The basic command to remember the seventh day of the week had not changed. But the *why*, the interpretation, had. Different times, different people, different circumstances: different interpretations.

A "dominant world" (here meaning the dominant culture in North America) interprets the Sabbath as a day of rest from the frantic lifestyle in a materialistic, consumer-driven culture that they believe is the American Dream. However, many are slaves of a different sort: slaves to possessions, which makes them slaves to the banks who lent the money allowing them to overextend themselves, which in turn handcuffs them to the jobs that generate the money needed to pay the bank.

However, even in North America, there are people who have been excluded, who live a precarious existence on the margins of society, including many of its original inhabitants. What might the Sabbath look like to them? What might the Sabbath mean to neighbors who lack legal status, and therefore must live in the shadows? Who, like in the

parable Jesus told about a group of day laborers, hope that they might be paid to work in the vineyard for a day, or even for couple of hours?

What might Sabbath mean to a Rama Indian, someone like Hilario, who is willing to work but no one will give him a job? Or to Doris, his wife, whose days are spent in her primitive kitchen, cooking on an open wood fire in a *fogón*, in order to feed her family of eight, plus numerous members of her extended family—and me? The fire burns, the heat is intense, but so is the smoke, which fills the kitchen. It is difficult for me to breathe it even for just a few hours at a time. This is her life, three-hundred sixty-five and one-quarter days a year. Doris represents untold numbers of women around the world who feed their families this way, untold numbers of whom die each year from respiratory problems as a result. What might Sabbath look like to her?

Whenever we preach, teach, or recite the Sabbath command, we need to recite the entire command, not truncate it to its convenient, more easily memorized, but inaccurate form. The entire list of who is included should be repeated. It is not a command for the individual; it is for all of Creation, and it is a reminder to advocate for those who cannot experience it.

Of course, Sabbath observance is also affected by particular contexts. For me, that context was the home I grew up in, where Sunday was considered the Sabbath and kept holy. As a child I felt that it was legalistic to forbid activities such as mowing the lawn, sewing, or anything else that my father considered to be “work.” However, our Sabbath might also mean paddling the canoe through the lily pads on Swartswood Lake, a hike through the woods, or grilling burgers on an outside fire. Most importantly however, after morning worship, it meant that we had the undivided attention of a loving father. My

mother was there of course, but she was available the rest of the week, whereas my father worked as a carpenter six days a week and served on multiple church and community boards. Contextualized to my childhood, the Sabbath brings back memories of my father, from whom I also learned about my heavenly Father. There is something very biblical about that.

Regardless of context or the way in which we “remember,” Christians should be more intentional about observing the Sabbath. Perhaps it should be Saturday, but then again, Jesus rejected much of the *halakah* that had developed over the years in Second Temple Judaism. On the surface, the disputes between Jesus and the Pharisees regarding Sabbath day observance make it appear that “Jesus was concerned with substantive issues of utmost (eternal) significance, while the Pharisees were bogged down in pettyfogging legalism,”³⁹ but this would be caricaturizing the situation. The need to observe the Sabbath was not in dispute; whether it is “lawful to do good” on the Sabbath (Matt 12:12, Mark 3:4, Luke 6:9), even when it involves “work,” was.

“The Sabbath was resting, not for reaping,” so when the disciples gleaned grain in the field, an event reported in all synoptic Gospels, a legitimate concern was raised. In defense of his disciples’ actions, Jesus appeals to the account in 1 Samuel, where David and his men flee from King Saul. In need of food, David asks Ahimelech to give them the holy bread that was reserved exclusively for the priests. The priest agrees to hand over the bread (“provided that the young man have kept themselves from women”) (1Sam 21:1-6).

³⁹ F. Scott Spencer, *What Did Jesus Do? Gospel Profiles of Jesus' Personal Conduct* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), 180.

Jesus also notes that “on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and yet are guiltless” (Matt 12:7), and clinches his argument with “if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (Matt 12:7-8). Even though the cornfield is not a sanctuary, Jesus implies that his disciples are on an urgent mission that requires unusual measures, while also claiming a priestly prerogative for himself, as Lord of the Sabbath.

While the words and actions of Jesus lift some constraints regarding Sabbath laws, he does not authorize trade and commerce activities.⁴⁰ How could he? The Sabbath was part of God’s creative activity in the beginning, and the same “Word [that] became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14) is the same Word that was “was with God, and the Word was God.... All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being” (John 1:1-3). Jesus, by word and deed, affirms “doing good” any day of the week, but he in no way minimizes the importance of Sabbath observance.

In the act of observing the Sabbath, we need to “remember” the reality that there are people who, for whatever reason, lack freedom to do the same. The Sabbath command is as relevant today as it ever was; however, our focus needs to be outward as well as inward. It is a matter of *orthopraxy* every much as it is one of *orthodoxy*. The message of the Sabbath is one of the divine blessings of justice, of equality, and of overturning the status quo—those unjust structures that humans have made—toward a realization of God’s plan for all of Creation to experience *shalom*.

⁴⁰ Spencer, 183, 187.

Implications for this Thesis Project

Similar to the manner in which the churches in Galatia showed deference to Jewish-Christian missionaries, I have been accorded credibility in Central America because of my country of origin. On more than one occasion I have entered a church for the sole purpose of participating in worship, only to be handed the microphone, simply because I am North American. Why? Likely there are multiple factors, but it is in part because most Americans have more academic education than does the average Latino in the region where I live. Academic credentials are confused with intelligence. (The assumption also may be that I have greater access to money than they do.)

In any event, the error of the Jewish-Christian missionaries serves as a warning to me that, in the process of working with the Rama community, particularly in terms of teaching theology to their pastor and providing guidance on how to “do” church, I avoid the culture-gospel, gospel-culture confusion as much as possible. This might not be one-hundred percent achievable, as on the one hand, I am who I am and that cannot be erased, and on the other, God has charged me with this mission, partly because of who I am. At the same time, I need to show deference in reverse order. For instance, I reserve judgment on even questionable cultural practices, at least until I am confident that I understand them. If need be, I quietly raise my concerns to the leadership, but allow them to discern and decide, for the very heart of the gospel is not at stake in my opinions but in their responses to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

At the same time, the Jewish-Christian missionary fiasco also motivates me to be more intentional in encouraging the Rama to embrace their ethnic and cultural identity, which has been seriously eroded by outsiders, including missionaries. Being Christian

does not preclude being Indian any more than being Christian requires a person to embrace Judaism. A new church, a new beginning, means a new opportunity to reclaim their ethnic identity while at the same time discovering and embracing their identity as Christians.

For the Rama, their religious identity is tied historically to the Moravian church. While that does distinguish them from the dominant *mestizo* population, Moravian missionaries contributed to the erosion of Rama identity, especially their native language, by confusing culture with the gospel, the effects of which were devastating. In part, their insistence on being Moravian is a reaction to their surroundings—the *mestizo* churches are Pentecostal (or neo-Pentecostal), plus one Roman Catholic church that is minus a priest, and these are all “Spanish” churches. The Moravian church, a more traditional church in terms of theology and worship, separates them from their surroundings. Therefore, they want to be known as Moravian, and so be it, but that does not mean that everything Moravian should be adopted without critical reflection.

I believe that most religious people act based upon sincerely-held beliefs and not with malicious intent. The Jewish-Christian missionaries were sincere; so were the Moravians who invaded Rama Cay in the 1800s. So also, I would have to grudgingly admit, are those within the complementarian movement who believe that the gospel needs to be defended against the scourge of women not knowing their proper place. As my father would say, though, “the road to hell is paved with good intentions.”

Reflecting on the sometimes less-than-stellar track record of missionaries throughout the ages including the present age, it is a sobering reminder to me regarding my ministry among the Rama. I have been welcomed among them, accorded automatic

deference, and my word carries weight, so I need to evaluate what I say and do carefully. My immediate task is to teach (part of the challenge being finding effective ways *how* to teach) essential skills of biblical hermeneutics and homiletics to Hilario McCrea John, pastor of the Indian River Indigenous Church, in a manner that he can comprehend and apply within his immediate context. Rather than presenting techniques which might be mimicked, or teaching set-in-stone “facts” for him to repeat to his congregation, the goal is to encourage critical thinking, through which bold questions might be asked of Scripture, and of God, as he waits upon the Holy Spirit for answers which he can then speak to his people. Hopefully, somehow, in some way, they might catch a little Sabbath glimpse of heaven on earth.

I also hope that what is learned through this thesis project will promote awareness of the critical, mostly unmet need for theological education among a significant population of pastors and other ministry leaders in Central America. Scattered throughout the countryside, these servants of God are mostly invisible to city-based theological institutions. Furthermore, few possess an elementary school education (Hilario studied through the third grade); some are entirely illiterate, and yet God calls them to serve. He also calls them to prepare—and most realize that—but how? Absent alternatives that are accessible to them, the void is filled with an assortment of non-gospels. Their hermeneutics are informed by the “prosperity” gospel, fringe sects (Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons are a prominent presence), neo-charismatic-Pentecostal groups who do not need the Bible because they have the Holy Spirit, Fundamentalists promoting assorted “yokes of slavery,” and the list goes on.

Overwhelmingly, these pastors lack adequate ministerial training. Even though many are not timid about standing in the pulpit and speaking, textbook assignments and written essays are beyond their abilities, so they are unable to benefit from traditional means of preparation for the ministry. Therefore, absent other options, they imitate, both in content and style, preachers on television (the *de facto* theological seminary). Many of these tele-evangelists are shown deference because they wear expensive clothing, preach in high-tech stadiums, and appear to speak authoritatively. They are assumed to be credible in the same way that the Galatians opened the doors to missionaries because they were Jewish, the way that the Rama welcomed the Moravian missionaries, and the way that they welcomed me, also a missionary. However, an impressive-sounding discourse and commanding stage presence, absent a message from God, is not *preaching*, it is public speaking. There is a big difference, and to his credit, Hilario instinctively knows this. His challenge will be to find his voice, although for him it is not a fear of speaking in public. Rather, he fears committing a grave sin by misinterpreting Holy Scripture. Humility is a solid starting place for the sacred task before him!

For me, in the broader context of church planting, the goal is to honor the trust that the Rama have placed in me by helping them to seek new ways to do church while preserving old traditions, and to find ways to embrace their ethnic identity while updating it for the new realities. I am privileged to have a small part to play in this, and as a “minister of encouragement” I can only hope that, by word and deed, my contribution is a positive one. Beyond that, less of me is probably more.

Hilario is optimistic, believing that his people will see God perform a miracle in their midst. His optimism is despite having lived in extreme poverty for most, if not all,

of his life, despite having fought in a bloody war that cost the lives of friends and family, and despite passionate attempts to persuade the Nicaraguan “Spanish” colonizers to honor the constitutional law guaranteeing indigenous autonomy. He is an old warrior that will continue to fight so that his people do not become “extinct, as so many rain forest animals have done.”⁴¹ The erosion-by-force of the Rama culture continues, so where does his optimism come from, then? Perhaps Hilario’s vision is prophetic. Perhaps the Rama *will* see God do miracles among them. Perhaps his downtrodden little tribe will be transformed into a beacon to the community around it, even to the world.

The Rama say, in reference to their ancestral lands, “this land is for all of we.”⁴² The cosmic vision of Sabbath is a powerful reminder that salvation goes far beyond the individualistic “Jesus saves *my* soul and sets *me* free” of popular Christian culture. As part of the holy catholic church, *me* is one tiny part of *we*, and *our* job is to follow Jesus in proclaiming the kingdom of God and all that it entails. “For all of we” is a lesson for the world, a lesson that the church universal badly needs to remember.

The Rama, oppressed peoples around the world that they represent, and even the perpetrators of oppression, desperately need a Sabbath reminder of God’s *shalom*. The Sabbath reminds us of *shalom* lost due to sin, a glimmer of hope for *shalom* to be at least partially reclaimed here and now, and a foreshadowing of a future in which the world is

⁴¹ Hilario McCrea John, letter written to supporters of SIGA Ministry Partners describing the need for an indigenous church in San Juan de Nicaragua, undated (ca. 2013). English was standardized to aid in comprehension, but the message is his own. See Appendix A “Rama Documents.”

⁴² An informative video is entitled “This Land is for All of We: A small Rama community in Bangkukuk, Nicaragua, speaks out about the Grand Canal Project.” It includes interviews with villagers who will be displaced by the canal. PrettyGoodProductions, October 15, 2014, accessed April 3, 2017, <https://vimeo.com/109026969>.

fully reconciled to God, where *shalom* is experienced by all of Creation. In all of this, the *missio ekklesia* is not a passive one:

If the church will listen in humility for the sound of the Spirit, not knowing whence the Spirit comes or whither the Spirit goes, the church may see a rebirth as profound and as significant, both for it and for the world, as that of the Reformation. Everything depends on our listening, and on our willingness to pray and to work for the setting free of all captives of our time. We must be willing to rethink... our inherited theological formulations in the light of a very new world which we are privileged to enter. Rather than clinging desperately to old formulas, we must wait for a Word from God, and for new words with which to name, confident that God who began a good work will complete it.⁴³

⁴³ Throckmorton, 538.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is organized into three sections. First, critiques of the effectiveness of the contemporary “compassion industry,” which includes missions, since I am a minister serving among the poor. Second, the legacy of centuries of Christian mission to Native Americans; since the Rama, as to virtually all indigenous groups throughout the Americas were caught up in the Conquest. Finally, the ministry of preaching, particularly as it relates to the task of teaching homiletics to non-literate learners, since a hoped-for outcome of this project is to equip Hilario for the preaching ministry.

If it is true that there are “4 billion oral communicators of the world: people who can’t, don’t, or won’t take in new information or communicate by literate means,”¹ then the implications of this project extend beyond its immediate context, which is to find effective ways to prepare Hilario McCrea John for proclaiming the Gospel to his people, the Indian River community of the Rama Nation in Nicaragua.

A “Growing Scandal” of Generosity

Two books of relatively recent publication, with a focus specifically on Christian charitable relief efforts, are *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (And How to Reverse It)*² by Robert D. Lupton and *When Helping Hurts, How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor ... and Yourself* by Steve Corbett and Brian

¹ Samuel Chiang, et al., eds., *Making Disciples of Oral Learners* (Lima, NY: International Orality Network in cooperation with Elim Publishing, 2005), 3.

² Robert D. Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (And How to Reverse It)* (New York: HarperOne, 2011).

Fikkert.³ The authors share from a wealth of frontline experience in ministry and poverty relief, and as one can surmise from the titles of these two works, they contend that these efforts, particularly in terms of poverty relief, are not what they should be.

It quickly becomes clear that Lupton is not an advocate for the way many churches do ministry among the poor. He compares church outreach initiatives (clothing handouts, food pantries, Christmas gifts to poor children) with welfare entitlements in the United States, which have created “a permanent underclass, dismantling their family structures, and eroding their ethic of work.”⁴ Even though these programs have failed to lift people out of poverty, this same approach continues to be utilized by non-governmental organizations and churches, with similar results. “Our free food and clothing distribution encourages ever-growing handout lines, diminishing the dignity of the poor while increasing their dependency.”⁵ While operating with good intentions, “the negative outcomes of welfare are no different when charities or churches provide it.”⁶ This approach destroys personal initiative, but worse still, disempowers the person on the receiving end of these benevolences.

Corbett and Fikkert echo Lupton regarding handout-oriented charity. Referring to the relief efforts in response to Hurricane Katrina, “tens of thousands of Christians rushed to assist... and in many ways it was a great testimony to the beauty of the body of Christ.”⁷ They tell of one short-term mission (STM) team that cleared roads and homes of

³ Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor ... and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2012).

⁴ Lupton, 3.

⁵ Lupton, 4.

⁶ Lupton, 129.

⁷ Corbett, 156.

debris, an appropriate response in the immediate aftermath. However, when this same team returned to help to rebuild, they found themselves working while young, able-bodied men stood by and watched. The problem with this scenario is obvious: when we address needs by “doing for” rather than “doing with,” we inadvertently create dependency, which disempowers the individual. “When we respond to a chronic need as though it were a crisis, we can predict toxic results.”⁸

The authors carefully avoid oversimplifying what being poor means, noting that the poor themselves speak of poverty in terms of “shame, inferiority, powerlessness, humiliation, fear, hopelessness, depression, social isolation, and voicelessness.”⁹ Just as the problem “goes well beyond the material dimension, so the solutions must go beyond the material as well.”¹⁰ The story is told of a church’s outreach program to poor families living in a public housing complex. For years, volunteers would take Christmas gifts to the children. Meanwhile, fathers would sneak out the back door, for their “deep sense of shame and inadequacy” was only magnified by the church’s good deeds.¹¹ At the same time, the church volunteers became disillusioned, because they could not see that they were making a difference.

A small church near my Virginia home avoids this problem—for both the giver and the receiver—by collecting donated items, used and new, and inviting low-income adults from a nearby public housing project to the church’s “Christmas Bazaar.” At a deep discount, economically poor individuals purchase small gifts for their loved ones, so

⁸ Lupton, 56.

⁹ Corbett, 51.

¹⁰ Corbett, 52.

¹¹ Corbett, 63.

the self-esteem of the individual is preserved. This model might deprive the donors of instant gratification, but families are far better served this way, as the joys of gift giving occur between parent and child.

Paternalism, doing “things for people that they can do for themselves,”¹² is poisonous to all. Three types of paternalism are mentioned: resource paternalism, spiritual paternalism, and knowledge paternalism. The first type is obvious. The person who possesses the resources controls how those resources are invested. The “materially poor” individual has little to say in the matter.

“Spiritual paternalism” assumes that individuals and churches that possess the resources to share with the materially poor are also qualified to teach the poor about God, failing to recognize that “often times the materially poor have an even deeper walk with God and have insights and experiences that they can share with us, *if we would just stop talking and listen.*”¹³ For example, the occasional group arrives, knowing little about my neighbors and the needs of the community, but expecting to conduct door-to-door evangelism. Do they assume that my neighbors have never heard the gospel, just because they are poor? Children are taught in the public schools that God created the world, that Jesus is God’s son, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, buried, and on the third day rose from the dead. That does not mean that they have no spiritual needs; it is just that they have heard the gospel.

The last type of paternalism is “managerial paternalism.” Sometimes this is simply a matter of differences in cultural values. For instance, North Americans place

¹² Corbett, 109.

¹³ Corbett, 110.

high value on efficiency; we will get the job done in the least amount of time utilizing the most efficient methods available. We come with the resources, and we control the project plan. We “take charge” and “show them” how things can be done more efficiently.

Our project to build a church in Rama country would have been completed a year ago if this approach had been followed. In fact, I initially planned to have volunteer teams help, partly for the resources they might bring. Fortunately, before going down this path very far, two things occurred. Nicaragua “invaded” Costa Rica by crossing the San Juan River and building an army fort on a piece of swamp land claimed by Costa Rica. This created an uncertain climate in which I was not willing to travel to Nicaragua with visitors. A team had been lined up, but I postponed their visit, initially because of the insecurity of the region. Then, I read about a team of construction volunteers that had gone to Haiti after one of the disasters. They went with their expertise, and most importantly, their money with which to buy materials. Local Haitian builders participated, but the visiting team insisted on doing things their way. They had the money, so they controlled the decisions. Then, after the volunteers left, the Haitians tore down their work and rebuilt, according to their own preferred methods. Our course of action became clear: take the long road, and as much as possible let the Rama take the lead.

One of the problems these authors highlight is a failure to distinguish the appropriate type of response required by a given situation. “A helpful first step in thinking about working with the poor in any context is to discern whether the situation calls for relief, rehabilitation, or development.” Failure to do this, they contend, is “one of the biggest mistakes that North American churches make—by far—in applying relief in

situations in which rehabilitation or development is the appropriate intervention.”¹⁴ It is “one of the most common reasons that poverty-alleviation efforts often do harm.”¹⁵

Relief is appropriate in emergency situations, but not in the long term. Once the immediate emergency has passed, rehabilitation efforts are more appropriate, when working with the poor as they “participate in their own recovery” is more appropriate. After rehabilitation comes the “development” stage, where “the key dynamic in development” is involving the people in becoming “more of what God created them to be.”¹⁶

One reason why churches often fail to distinguish between emergency relief, rehabilitation and development is a direct result of the way needs are marketed by charitable organizations. Americans are generous in responding to an immediate crisis, but they tend to neglect the long road to recovery, so aid agencies prolong the 'emergency' well into what should be development work. Citing the devastation that occurred in New Orleans because of Hurricane Katrina, they claim that a full six years after the hurricane hit, churches still “marketed” the crisis, and “volunteers continue[d] to flow into the city by the thousands, distributing free food and clothing to 'victims.' *When relief does not transition to development in a timely way, compassion becomes toxic.*”¹⁷

These authors all take to task the relatively recent phenomenon among many churches to send volunteers on short-term missions (STM) trips as “large-scale misappropriations of charitable resources.”¹⁸ Lupton calls it a “growing scandal that we

¹⁴ Corbett, 101.

¹⁵ Corbett, 99.

¹⁶ Corbett, 100.

¹⁷ Lupton, 7.

¹⁸ Lupton, 6.

refuse to see and actively perpetuate,”¹⁹ where Americans spend an estimated \$2.5 to \$5 *billion* annually on STMs that “seldom yield appreciable improvement in the lives of those being served.”²⁰

The STM phenomenon is a “burgeoning movement” where “money is the grease which turns the spiritual wheels.” Referring to organizations that specialize in facilitating these trips (for a fee), Lupton calls it “a lucrative growth industry run by entrepreneurs claiming they’re ‘just wanting to serve the cause of Christ’ even as they scramble for a market share.”²¹ The methods used to promote STMs are “not always honest, and like cure-all elixirs peddled by snake-oil salesmen, many of the promises of mission-trip marketing do not measure up to the hype.”²²

Too often, considering limitations in time, skills, and language barriers, and the desire for STM volunteers to go home with success stories, hosts can find themselves inventing “make work” projects. Lupton illustrates the point: “a church in Mexico that was painted six times during one summer by six different mission groups” as well as “a church in Ecuador built by volunteers that was never used as a church because the community had no need for it.”²³ The work of these volunteers “do not effect lasting change” and the money could be more wisely spent on true missions and relief work rather than on “religious tourism.”²⁴

¹⁹ Lupton, 1.

²⁰ Lupton, 1.

²¹ Lupton, 67.

²² Lupton, 65.

²³ Lupton, 14.

²⁴ Lupton, 15.

Even though these observations strike a familiar chord, I cannot judge STMs so harshly. For one, I have received some good groups that were a real help, especially at Christmastime when we sort, wrap, and deliver hundreds of gifts to children in small villages in the region. I have no issue with churches that hold bake sales and fundraisers so that some of their members can participate in a trip.

However, particularly when it comes to the “professional” facilitators, I am inclined to agree with the authors, based upon my limited experience. Organizations whose sole function is to facilitate STMs for a fee, promising a “‘meaningful experience’ in an exotic location rife with human need,”²⁵ is another matter altogether. There is too much emphasis on the need for STM team members to have a positive experience; the host is a tool to that end. Early in our ministry, an STM facilitator sent a group of eleven young people ages 17 to 22. I had expressed my preference for a smaller group, given the challenges of transportation, housing, and other considerations, but I was advised that ten was *their* break-even point, and being new at this, I agreed. The arrival date came, I hired a van driver and we went to the airport to pick up the group. I had been unable to communicate with anyone in the organization beforehand (despite having sent several emails), so I arranged for us to spend the night at a church outside of our village. This way we could get to know each other and properly set expectations for their time with us.

The young people on this team were sincere in their desire to serve the Lord. However, during our first night together, one of them—whom I had just met—calls me aside and asks, “do you believe in demons?” These are the first words spoken to me, and

²⁵ Lupton, 16. Lupton reports that the Bahamas alone typically receives annually one short-term missionary for every fifteen residents.

I am wondering what I have gotten myself into. I mentally sort through possible non-committal responses, but she quickly continued: “because at the [boot camp] a pastor and his wife came and prophesied to us about what we would experience on this trip. And they told me that I had a demon! I said that I didn’t, but they insisted that I did. And they laid their hands on me to cast it out. But I don’t believe I had a demon. Is it possible for me to have one and not know it?” I reassured the young woman that light overcomes darkness, and where there is light there is no darkness, and that if she is certain that she did not have a demon she did not have a demon. She seemed relieved, but I, on the other hand, was angry. These youth, some of whom were minors, had been entrusted to ‘professionals’ so that they could have a missions experience abroad in a safe environment. Had their parents, or their pastors known about this, I feel they would have been equally indignant.

In twelve years on the mission field, our ministry has received numerous groups, but we limit the number of groups to two or three a year. Many of our guests have been spiritually mature, humble people who have come to experience, and where they can, help. We tell them before they come that flexibility is the number requirement for a positive experience, and some of them listen. For the most part, we enjoy visitors, but preparing for their arrival and organizing activities requires considerable advance preparation. Still, there has been the occasional ‘loose cannon’ who arrives with a personal agenda and refuses to respect our wishes, despite being our guests, but they have been the exception.

Lupton’s insightful analysis of the effectiveness of STMs (Corbett and Fikkert define ‘short-term’ as less than two years) is correct in many respects, if the expectation

is to achieve the most “bang for the buck.” Finances should be considered, and churches should evaluate the money spent on STMs in light of overall missions giving (I do not think funding STMs *is* missions giving). Churches also should resist the temptation of classifying STMs as “missions work” even though some participants like to identify themselves as “missionaries.” For most, it is an *experience* more than it is *ministry*.

I know some people who participate in STMs every year. One friend spent \$3,000 to go to Europe to haul concrete in buckets for a construction project. I do not think that it ever occurred to that person—or the sending church—that \$3,000 multiplied by the number of participants could have purchased construction materials *and* provided employment to qualified construction workers for months. As a local pastor in Mexico City once confided to me, “[the denomination] always wants to send us construction teams, but we are supposed to buy the materials. We know how to build, but we do not have money for materials.”²⁶ Churches should prepare their teams, and both the participants and the churches who send them should be at least as committed to supporting long-term missions. In fact, that should be a stated objective of participating in STMs; to grow in understanding *and* giving.

The principal strengths of both *Toxic Charity* and *When Helping Hurts* are their respective diagnoses of the problems within the contemporary “compassion industry,” which includes STMs and local benevolence ministries, which all of the authors take particular care to identify in detail. However, while they offer some solutions for specific

²⁶ This was in 1990, my first STM trip. The trip was a transformational experience, but not in the way that denominational leaders expected. Although I felt affirmed in my calling to cross-cultural ministry, I also learned more about what *not* to do simply by conversing with the pastor and other leaders in the local church where we (there were only two of us on the team) were assigned. I am grateful to Pastor Saul and the brothers and sisters of *La Primera Iglesia Bautista de Azcapotzalco* for the continuing influence they have had on my ministry.

circumstances which might result in improvement, their recommendations, also very similar, are troubling, particularly because of an over-emphasis on microloans as the default solution to non-crisis needs. They fail outright to address biblical mandates regarding the poor, particularly the radical generosity that Jesus demands of his disciples. Their recommendations are based upon the premise that giving (without expecting anything in return) almost always harms the recipient as well as the giver.

It is true that one-way charity *sometimes* “subtly implies that the recipient has nothing of value the giver desires”²⁷ and that, to the extent the poor can participate in their own welfare and advancement they should. The specific context matters, of course. Perhaps a loan to an inner-city project to launch a cooperative business or day care, or at least in combination with a direct gift, would be a good solution in many situations. Recipients should invest in the solutions for themselves and their communities in some tangible way. However, particularly when it comes to individuals, lending—for both the lender and the borrower—is fraught with danger. Furthermore, it is still paternalism. Instead of establishing “mutually beneficial relationships characterized by responsibility, accountability, and respect,”²⁸ lending creates a creditor-debtor relationship that distances one from the other and subordinates the debtor to the creditor. Often, the poor already are burdened by debt, with rent-to-own, paycheck and car title loans, and “easy payments” store credit. This is true in poor communities in the US, and it is in Central America as well. Adding to their debt burden is not helpful; it is just the opposite. It could even be *toxic*. The Bible counsels against the dangers of indebtedness. Besides, none of the

²⁷ Lupton, 130.

²⁸ Lupton, 130.

authors seem to find fault with no-strings-attached donations to non-profits, which happens to be where they work.

SIGA avoids simple handouts except in crisis situations, because it does risk creating dependency. It took awhile for some of our neighbors to realize that we would not “loan” them money (that would likely never be repaid). Rather than lending, we prefer to *invest*. Typically, \$100 to \$400 is all it takes to help a family start a home-based business. We listen to their business idea, evaluate its workability, and then we invest without any ownership stake in the enterprise. We make it clear that it is not a loan, but rather an investment in the family. When the business succeeds, we tell them, they should consider paying back the investment so that someone else might benefit. If they fail, money does not need to be repaid, although if we purchase equipment for the business (sewing machine, electric mixer, etc.) we ask that it be returned to us. We believe that this model better reflects an attitude of equality and partnership, and is more biblical, as we are asking for nothing in return, while challenging individuals to act on their own behalf.

The Biblical Case for Radical Generosity

The mission of the church is to reflect Jesus Christ,

by doing what He did and what He continues to do through us: declare—using both words and deeds—that Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords who is bringing in a kingdom of righteousness, justice, and peace. And the church needs to do this where Jesus did it, among the blind, the lame, the sick and outcast, and the poor.²⁹

²⁹ Corbett, 41.

Jesus calls us to give generously, radically. The big question is, how? If STMs alone are a \$4 billion business, then this is the \$100 Billion Question. As I read both *Toxic Charity* and *When Helping Hurts*, riveted to the stories, nodding in agreement regarding the problems, I waited expectantly for them—Christian ministers—to address directly the biblical mandates regarding generosity that the church is called to fulfill. However, I was left hanging, my questions unanswered, not even addressed.

Yes, simple handouts can rob people of their humanity. The failure of U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson’s “war on poverty”—governmental public assistance programs—is an excellent example. Haiti has received more charitable aid and governmental assistance than any other country, and yet it remains the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. When handouts result in an “entitlement mentality and eroded spirit of entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency,”³⁰ helping can indeed hurt. However, emphasizing lending as a viable solution also harms the poor by placing additional burdens on them, and it amounts to placing a yoke of slavery on already vulnerable people.

None of the authors specifically addressed the teachings of Jesus regarding generosity toward the materially poor. Their proposed solutions of lending, so that we do not rob the poor of their humanity, implies that it is wrong to give (except to the “professionals” who work in poverty relief). We hurt by helping, so we help by withholding? This too is resource, spiritual, and material paternalism.

If generosity is *toxic*, then it is best to keep the money at home: it would be better to buy new carpeting for the sanctuary, rather than hurt the poor with that money. What

³⁰ Lupton, 36.

about the churches that are too poor to even have a floor? Moreover, it directly contradicts the words of Jesus, who said to lend without expecting anything in return (Luke 6:35), to not let the left hand know what the right hand is doing (Matt 6:3), and to give to anyone who asks (Luke 6:30).

Admittedly, Jesus' words are deceptively simple. They are easy enough to understand conceptually, but far more difficult to execute effectively, and the kind of giving that creates dependency, that robs a person of his or her humanity, can indeed be toxic. A simple redistribution of the world's wealth will not lift the materially poor out of poverty. And yet, Jesus challenges us to give, to overcome the false sense of security that we place in our money and possessions, to live sacrificially instead of selfishly. The greater challenge becomes to find ways to be generous that are helpful rather than hurtful, and that also honor the demands of Jesus.

I do not have the definitive answer to the \$100 Billion Question. There is no one answer, I think. Nonetheless, Jesus challenges us to give of our resources—which are really God's resources—and of ourselves. Certainly, we can learn by taking an honest look at what our benevolences have achieved thus far, where we have failed, and why. We can be better stewards, act more intelligently, guard against being manipulated, but still act with radical generosity.

Part of resolving the “growing scandal” of generosity lies in abandoning the resource paternalism that dominates the compassion industry. Churches and non-profits can work together, and they can work with the poor. The relationships should be *collaborative*, not just in execution but in decision making about resource allocation. Recognizing our mutual poverty, and our mutual need for one another, this is an obvious

place to begin: “it is a question of fair balance³¹ between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need” (2Cor 8:12-14).

SIGA helps the Rama plant a church. When there are needs in the community, we collaborate with the Rama on the best ways to address those needs. Working collaboratively can be difficult. It challenges our cultural preferences for efficiency, it can take time to build relationships of trust, and there are likely to be betrayals along the way (on both sides), but it can be achieved.

Some circumstances, however, we cannot change, even though we might try. The Rama are the poorest of the poor, but it is not because they do not want to work. We can do nothing to overturn the corrupt, oppressive structures that leave no avenue for achieving self-sufficiency, even when the person is willing and able to do so. To assume otherwise implies that the individual is at fault. It assumes that work is available, the employers treat their employees fairly, or at least that they pay them. For communities like the Rama these presuppositions simply do not apply. Decades of dislocation due to war, and violations of their legal rights, have prevented them from living according to traditional ways. Those ways would never result in an abundance of material possessions, but at least families would have enough to eat.

Lasting change for the Rama, at least judging by external circumstances, will have little chance until the country’s dictator is removed from power. Even if this does occur, he could easily be replaced by another like him. It would also require that their “Spanish”

³¹ Virtually all major translations, including KJV and NIV, translate *ἰσότης* (*isotés*) as “equality,” with the exception of the CEV, which translates “fair share.” Strong’s definition (24710) is “equality; equality of treatment, fairness.” My preference is “equality” as it is less subjective, i.e. what is “fair” means different things to different people, frequently based upon whether a person is on the giving or receiving end of that fairness. However, since the remaining Scripture citations are from NRSV, which is my personal preference, here consistency is being maintained.

(*mestizo*) neighbors cease to illegally trespass and destroy indigenous territories. Then *if* the remnant of the Rama people can summon the courage and faith to give it one more try, perhaps they can live in peace.

Lasting change for the Rama means that they need to find a way to persevere, despite everything. My observation over these past several years is that hope has faded, and the willingness to fight is rapidly diminishing. The older generation, mostly non-literate, are the guardians of what is left of their collective knowledge of Rama traditions; the following generation are desert wanderers, lacking any real sense of identity or purpose. There may still be a spark among the youth, but having been educated in public schools with a heavy dose of Sandinista propaganda, they are the group most distanced from their heritage. However, in the hands of this last group lies the future of the Rama, if there is to be one. This is one reason why SIGA provides scholarships to high school graduates who can and want to go to college; we hope that at least some of them will commit to improving the lives of their community. It is another way of making *micro investments*. We want the youth to at least have the opportunity, but what they do with it is beyond our control. We can only open the door, and hope that it will pay dividends, but we are ultimately not responsible for the outcome.

This brings me to one last observation about radical giving. Resource paternalism reflects our desire to control, which we believe we have the right to do, since we are the ones with the resources. We give paternalistically and we measure results paternalistically. However, the offering is to God, not to people. We need to work intelligently, yes, but ultimately, we are called to generosity, not to be successful. We neither can control nor are we responsible for what others might do. That is “official”

SIGA policy even; success is “God’s job,” not ours. Our job is to be faithful, for “it is required of stewards of that they be found trustworthy” (1Cor 4:2).

An Indian Perspective on the Indian Experience

With the objective of better understanding the history of the Rama Nation beyond anecdotal stories of relatively recent events, I began the search for information online. I quickly realized that, other than an occasional news reports regarding territorial disputes, very little reliable information about the Rama has been published. I suspect that this is due to their small numbers, relative isolation from the rest of the country, and therefore from the world.

The report “Defending Rama Indian Community Lands” (cited in the first chapter) provided useful information regarding the fight to preserve indigenous lands and the demarcation process of Rama territory.³² However, this did not address Rama spirituality or religious tradition, except to highlight the Moravian missionaries’ role in hastening the demise of the Rama tongue. The Moravian involvement echoes some of what I had already known about the experiences of Native Americans in the USA, so lacking other sources, I turned to U.S. history as it relates to the indigenous people who were already living on the land when Columbus made his “discovery.” My hope was to uncover some of the Rama story by extrapolation, so I sought specifically to hear the “great American narrative” from a Native American perspective.

³² See Appendix C, map of Rama territory and photo of geodesic marker installed in the demarcation.

That is how I found Dr. George E. Tinker. Tinker is a historian, prolific writer, and conference speaker. He is an elder of the Osage Nation, a Lutheran pastor, professor American Indian Cultures and Religious Traditions at Iliff School of Theology, and Native American scholar; a rather unique combination of qualifications for the task. *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* recounts stories of “four of the churches’ most loved and respected historical missionary figures who have been the subjects of countless hagiographies”³³ and their mission to American Indians, to “demonstrate the inevitable confusion ... between the gospel he, or occasionally she, proclaimed to Indian people and the missionary’s own European or Euro-American culture, and to trace the resulting devastation of Indian peoples and their cultures.”³⁴ “This is part of America’s unfinished business,”³⁵ he says, “the covert ‘lie’ of white self-righteousness as it was internalized and acted out by the missionaries themselves.”³⁶

Parallels between the Rama story, or what is known of it, and the experience of the indigenous people of North America were not difficult to find. In Central America, the Spanish *conquistadores* eviscerated indigenous communities on the Pacific coast, while the English and later the Americans claimed the Atlantic, and the Rama world was irrevocably changed. Unlike the Roman Catholics who accompanied the Spanish military, the Moravians arrived at Rama Cay in 1800s peacefully. However, as the brief history

³³ George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 88, Kindle.

³⁴ Tinker, 93-94.

³⁵ Tinker, 107.

³⁶ Tinker, 105.

presented in the first chapter reveals, the Rama also experienced cultural genocide in ways similar to those of their kinfolk to the north.

Tinker contends that

the motivation and the theoretical basis for the missionary endeavor, apparent both from the actual practice of the missionaries and from their writings, will demonstrate that they not only preached a new gospel of salvation, but also just as energetically imposed a new cultural model for existence on Indian people. The evidence will show that these two tasks became nearly indistinguishable in practice.³⁷

Whatever their intentions may have been, the missionaries became “partners in genocide... guilty of complicity in the destruction of Indian cultures and tribal social structures” and in the “devastating impoverishment and death of the people to whom they preached.”³⁸ Those are tough words to hear, especially for a Christian of European descent.

Tinker defines “cultural genocide” as “the effective destruction of the people by systematically... destroying, eroding, or undermining the integrity of the culture and system of values that defines a people.”³⁹ This, he claims, “almost always involved an attack on the spiritual foundations of a people’s unity by denying the existing ceremonial and mythological sense of a community.”⁴⁰

When told from a Native perspective, these stories become tragic. The four missionaries are John Eliot, a colonial Puritan of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Junípero Serra in California, Pierre-John De Smet in the Northwest and Henry Benjamin Whipple in Minnesota. In this review, I will summarize three of these accounts, that of the Puritan

³⁷ Tinker, 95.

³⁸ Tinker, 97.

³⁹ Tinker, 125.

⁴⁰ Tinker, 129.

Eliot, who “left his desk” in 1646 to evangelize the Indians, Serra, the Franciscan friar who founded the California mission system in 1769 and who was recently was canonized by the Roman Catholic Church, and Whipple, who in the latter half of the nineteenth century was bishop of the Episcopal Church in Minnesota.

While acknowledging that these missionaries demonstrated a “genuine interest in the well-being of Indian people and an announced commitment to bring them the gospel message,” they also “came with implicit, largely unspoken commitments to their own cultural values and social structures.”⁴¹ As Tinker has observed, “the most fearful aspect of the missionary history ... is the extent to which it is *a history of good intentions*.”⁴² If this indeed is the case, then the future of cross-cultural ministry, particularly among American Indians, demands that we learn from it.

Twelve years into colonization, the Massachusetts Bay Colony had yet to undertake a “fundamental part of the Massachusetts Royal patent ... ‘To Wynn and insight the natives... to Knowledge and Obedience of the onlie true God and Savior of Mankinde and the Christian Fayth.’”⁴³ Pressure from across the Pond resulted in a “flurry of activity in 1646 that resulted in Eliot becoming a missionary and the State facilitating the endeavor.”⁴⁴

For the Puritan, “social and cultural change was deemed a prerequisite [sic] to conversion,” so evangelization and discipleship training for the Indian included “forced

⁴¹ Tinker, 1877, emphasis added.

⁴² Tinker, 1883.

⁴³ “Charter of Massachusetts Bay: 1629,” *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy*, Yale Law School, accessed April 17, 2017, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/mass03.asp.

⁴⁴ Tinker, 389.

separation and alienation within families” by establishing separate communities called “praying towns.”⁴⁵ The changes imposed upon the people at Eliot’s behest were

deeply destructive and genocidal in that they affected the general cohesion and social organization of Indian peoples. Changes such as European-style agriculture, fencing, and English-style buildings eroded Indian social cohesion more subtly, but they nevertheless contributed to the transformation of the peoples from self-sufficiency to dependency. The imposition of new language structures, especially in the recitation of a new theological discourse also had its effect.⁴⁶

For centuries, missionaries assumed that integral to the task of evangelization was the removal of the Native Americans from their native contexts so that they could become ‘civilized.’ In other words, to be transformed by the renewing of the mind, the American Indian must necessarily conform to the world of the missionary. From east to west and parts in between, wherever missionaries (and the government) went, there is little evidence that this presupposition was ever seriously challenged.

The Spanish established missions in Mexico and eventually migrated north into California. Saint Junípero Serra supervised

forced conversions of native peoples to Christianity and the enforcement of those conversions by imprisonment; physical violence in the form of corporal punishment; the imposition of slave labor conditions on Indian converts for the support of the missions and the accompanying military presidios; a living environment that was akin to a concentration camp and cycles of famine and constant poor nourishment that were both unprecedented among these native peoples; an extraordinary death rate among converts; and the devastation of many California native cultures.⁴⁷

When the Franciscans withdrew from California in 1834, an indigenous population that had been “successfully dispossessed” of their ability to sustain

⁴⁵ Tinker, 389.

⁴⁶ Tinker, 468.

⁴⁷ Tinker, 728-729.

themselves⁴⁸ was left behind. And yet, Pope Francis recently declared Serra “saint,” even though “the descendants of those native inhabitants remain the most bitter opponents of Serra’s canonization.”⁴⁹ Tinker, and presumably others, see this move as

a not too subtle attempt to exonerate the church’s history of shame as a full partner in the conquest and destruction of the native inhabitants of the Americas. At another level, the canonization process also functions as a self-validation of Western culture and its political-economic structures of oppression, rooted in its history of colonialism and even genocide.⁵⁰

Evidently, these missionaries operated with illusions of superiority regarding their own culture, repeating the error of the first-century Jewish Christians who attempted to superimpose their Jewish customs on the gentiles of Galatia. They failed to question a syncretism of culture with their own religious beliefs by presuming that “true” Christian converts must necessarily adopt the “Christian” culture of Euro-America. This holds true, it seems, with the Rama, who also experienced a loss of language, culture, and way of life at the hands of missionaries and numerous governments, including the U.S., England, and Nicaragua.

At times, missionaries worked hand in hand with governmental authorities in its efforts to resolve the ‘Indian problem.’ Motivations for doing so may have been well-meaning, as appears to have been the case with Henry Benjamin Whipple. He was considered “a genuine friend of Indian people,” to whom the indigenous people of Minnesota gave the name “Straight Tongue.”⁵¹ Whipple squarely laid the blame at the feet of the government as “the ultimate cause of Indian retaliations and uprisings.”⁵² The

⁴⁸ Tinker, 798.

⁴⁹ Tinker, 743.

⁵⁰ Tinker, 1138-1140. At the time of its publication, Serra had not yet been canonized.

⁵¹ Tinker, 1627.

⁵² Tinker, 1629.

politically connected Whipple, who corresponded with President James Buchanan and met with Abraham Lincoln, actively advocated for the well-being of the original inhabitants of the country, but the solutions he offered were based upon his “own vision of Indian well-being.”⁵³

Whipple was bishop during a period of growing animosity toward the American Indian. Because of uprisings—the result of broken treaties—settlers began to demand extermination of all Indians in Minnesota.⁵⁴ In the 1860s it “fueled politicians in Colorado... and even captured the hearts of some missionaries.”⁵⁵ One-time missionary to the Indians in Kansas, the Rev. John Chivington, a Methodist minister, “took leave from his conference where he had served as district superintendent” in order to lead a “territorial militia [which had been] assigned the task of ridding the territory of ‘the Indian infestation,’” and which resulted in the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864.⁵⁶ Alarmed by this growing climate of animosity, Whipple and others pushed for reform of the government’s policies toward Indians.⁵⁷ However, that reform was based on the presumption that,

survival of Indian peoples depended on their civilization and assimilation into American society; that dismantling of tribal structures was therefore a necessity; that learning agricultural pursuits and the value of private land tenure was fundamental to the process, and a *prerequisite to granting Indian citizenship*; that education and Christianization were also necessary components.⁵⁸

⁵³ Tinker, 1733.

⁵⁴ Tinker, 1642.

⁵⁵ Tinker, 1559.

⁵⁶ Tinker, 1659.

⁵⁷ Tinker, 1743.

⁵⁸ Francis Paul Prucha, ed., *Americanizing the American Indian: Writings by the “Friends of the Indian, 1880-1900”* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), in Tinker, 1746. Emphasis added.

In 1876, Whipple served as negotiator on the Sioux Peace Commission at the behest of the U.S. government. The purpose of these ‘negotiations’ was to obtain new concessions for land in the Black Hills and to build roads through Sioux Territory. As the commission’s principal spokesman, Whipple told the Sioux that “the proposal was fixed in stone and could not be changed. They could either be accepted or rejected, and Whipple made clear that rejection meant self-destruction for the Sioux.”⁵⁹ Reverend Straight Tongue, with the best of intentions, “engineered the U.S. government’s theft of the Black Hills from the Sioux people, which finally broke the back of Sioux resistance.”⁶⁰

Capitalizing on the Christian desire to evangelize and teach the Native American to be ‘civilized,’ President S. Ulysses Grant delegated to Christian denominations the “responsibility for filling the positions of Indian agent, parceling out particular nations or reservations to various denominations,⁶¹ assigning the *church* primary responsibility for the Indian nations.”⁶² Laws were passed that outlawed ‘pagan’ ceremonial dances, a cultural tradition that worried the missionaries. Disobedience at times was met by military force, as was the case in 1890 at Wounded Knee, where 350 people were massacred.⁶³ In the end, Christian missionary outreach to the indigenous people, sometimes intentionally and others not, facilitated the “disruptive incursion of Euro-

⁵⁹ Tinker, 1806.

⁶⁰ Tinker, 17.

⁶¹ Tinker, 140.

⁶² Tinker, 197.

⁶³ Tinker, 151.

American military, political, economic, and social power into an Indian nation's existence."⁶⁴ The principal aim of the government was the

enculturation of the Indian as a strategic maneuver to fulfill the Manifest Destiny of the Euro-American to settle the west.... It survived as fundamental educational policy in mission schools of all denominations in North America and in U.S. Government boarding schools well into the 1960s; where Indian children continued to be separated from their families and *punished when caught speaking their native language* with a fellow tribesperson.⁶⁵

The enculturation by force of Native Americans as perpetrated by both Christian missionaries and the U.S. government (so much for the First Amendment), Tinker contends, is directly responsible for "much of the community dysfunctionality so apparent in all of Indian country today."⁶⁶ Hundreds of years later, "Indian people suffer the lowest per capita income of any ethnic group..., the highest teenage suicide rate, a 60 percent unemployment rate nationally, and a scandalously low longevity that remains below sixty years for both men and women."⁶⁷

Tinker observes that "traditional values and spiritual strengths continue at all is a testament to the endurance and will to survive of our tribal nations."⁶⁸ The same can be said for the Rama. Like the Rama, though,

native peoples have not survived intact. Each of our reservation or urban Indian communities is consistently plagued with individual and community dysfunctions that eat away at the well-being of the people. With far too much assistance and complicity from the missionaries the US government has carefully manipulated our nations into relationships of total dependence that are today best described as co-dependent.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Tinker, 195.

⁶⁵ Tinker, 858, emphasis added.

⁶⁶ Tinker, 1730

⁶⁷ Tinker, 76.

⁶⁸ Tinker, 1961.

⁶⁹ Tinker, 1961.

If these case studies of Euro-American missions to the American Indian are indeed representative of the missionary enterprise in general, it is of little surprise, then, that resistance to the ‘white man’s religion’ is strong even today.

Over all, there seems to have been little questioning of the superiority of Euro-American cultural values. Perhaps some might have questioned the validity of American expansionism, but there appears to have been little resistance to it. There was a universal assumption that Indian spiritual traditions were “pagan” and therefore must be eradicated, even eliciting the government’s help through legislation to do it. All appear to have confused gospel with culture by insisting that proof of conversion include adopting Euro-American lifestyles. There is little evidence that anyone recognized that the Indians might have something to teach *them* about living in community and in harmony with the environment. They all readily confused, as did the Jewish-Christian missionaries in Galatia, as did the Moravians on Rama Cay, the gospel of Jesus Christ with their own culture and values.

Yes, these missionaries were products of their times and denominations and culture. So are we today; we all carry our own cultural biases with us wherever we go. That American triumphalism, the grandchild of Manifest Destiny, continues today is difficult to refute, which is why it becomes *imperative* that we learn to distinguish between gospel and culture.

Tinker calls upon the church to acknowledge her active participation in the genocide of indigenous people throughout the Americas. The recent canonization of Junípero Serra, and the general ignorance among Christian congregations of their own denomination’s complicity, are examples of that not being the case. “The legacy of the

European society that produced a Serra is still a part of the American experience and demands our attention if we are to live better than those who stumbled before us.”⁷⁰

Tinker says, “Indian people’s relationships with the land ... is very different from the farmer’s relationship to the land. Land is just a commodity in that system.”⁷¹ This is echoed by Hilario, who says, “if someone asks for permission to live on our land, we let them, but they have to live according to our ways.”⁷² Incursions by “Spanish” Nicaraguans arriving from the west have strained their hospitality, for these “real Nicaraguans” arrive with the intention to cut down the forest, put up fences, and lay claim to (“settle”) land that is not theirs. American expansion under the banner of Manifest Destiny was a fight for land. The American Indian’s continuing fight for self-determination is also a fight for land, for the land is life, and an “Indian is not an Indian without his land.”⁷³

After the civil war, a spotlight shone for a time on the Rama. International pressure resulted in new “treaties” between Managua and the indigenous nations of the Atlantic coast. Perhaps the international community was not concerned about a small band of Indians as much as they were about the vast, virgin rainforest that they called home, but whatever the motive, Nicaragua adopted Law 445, granting autonomy to the Indian, over their culture, language, economic activities, and land.⁷⁴ The World Bank

⁷⁰ Tinker, 1001.

⁷¹ Tinker, “How the West Was Lost: An Indian Take on the American Romance of the West”, Week Five Interfaith Lecture series, “The American West: Religious Evolution and Innovations,” Chautauqua Institution, July 23, 2014, accessed May 12, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkIRG9FvN3g>.

⁷² Hilario McCrea John, Interviewed July 2014.

⁷³ McCrea John.

⁷⁴ Gobierno Territorial Rama y Kriol Asamblea Territorial, “Plan Autónomo de Desarrollo y Administración del Territorio Rama y Kriol (PADA), Guía de Convivencia Económica y Social,” (internal document of policies regarding non-Rama or Kriol inhabitants in autonomous territory, approved by Rama representatives in Bluefields, Nicaragua on January 26, 2009, updated July 24, 2011). This document

provided funding for demarcation of that land. The Rama, with renewed hope for the future, were energized into reclaiming their lives.

A flurry of activity ensued, one of which was to define who would be allowed to inhabit the territory, due to the waves of “Spanish” invaders claiming ownership of their land, with falsified documents, and on occasion, with guns. The territorial and communal governments developed a standardized formula to determine who (that is, someone not Rama or Kriol) could live on Rama lands. Land titles issued before 1987 were honored, and anything issued after March 1999 automatically null and void. Between these two extremes, individuals could apply for permission to live on the land, on condition that they contractually agree to practice a way of life compatible with the community and pay an annual fee.⁷⁵ Since then, however, it has become increasingly obvious that the Nicaraguan government has little interest in honoring these “treaties,” and the glimmer of hopefulness that had been stirred with the promise of autonomy has since faded.

Tinker acknowledges that Whipple, like the others,

really could not have done other than what he did, but this by no means excuses him. Indeed it becomes all the more important for modern white America to learn from the traps and pitfalls of his valiant attempt to achieve the best for his people, including the Indian people.... Health and well-being come not from denying our past or even disassociating ourselves from it, but only from acknowledging and learning from it.⁷⁶

In 2016, Pope Francis admitted that “many grave sins were committed against the native peoples of America in the name of God” for which “I humbly ask forgiveness, not only for the offenses of the church herself but also for the crimes committed against the

makes reference to the territory as being 406,649.3 hectares (over one million acres) of land, plus 441.308 hectares of marine area, which includes 22 cays.

⁷⁵ Gobierno Territorial Rama y Kriol Asamblea Territorial.

⁷⁶ Tinker, 1870.

native peoples during the so-called conquest of America.”⁷⁷ And yet, he canonized Junípero Serra. Liberation for both the oppressed and oppressor will never really occur while the partners in genocide are idolized or canonized. Wounds will never fully heal unless the Euro-American church acknowledges her historical complicity in the devastation that occurred in the name of the gospel.

Thanks to Tinker, I have become more conscious of my ‘over-functioning’ tendencies and cultural biases. I now defer to Rama leaders in decision making as much as possible. It was the Rama’s idea to build a church; I did not even suggest it. Rama hands are building it, too, and what happens afterwards will be up to the Rama. I hope that, if some of them perhaps even remember me years from now, they will think of me as “Straight Tongue” too, only as someone who tried to lift them up and give them hope, not as one who placed genocidal obstacles in the way of their hearing and embracing the Good News.

The Rice and Beans of Preaching

I have read literally dozens of books on preaching, for the most part, written by professors of homiletics or preachers who are well known for their preaching abilities. I have personally benefited from many of them; they have informed and enriched my own preaching ministry both in the USA and here in Central America, two distinct contexts that require different approaches.

⁷⁷ Pope Francis, in Daniel Burke, “Pope: Poor are sacrificed on ‘the altar of money’,” CNN, accessed July 12, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/07/10/living/pope-notes-prison/index.html>. Excerpt from a speech in Santa Cruz, Bolivia during an eight-day tour of South America.

Of course, preaching styles differ, influenced by the worship tradition, culture, and personality of the preacher, but also by the immediate context. For example, I tend to preach extemporaneously in Spanish, partly because primitive facilities where there might not be a lectern demand it, but also because the preacher is not typically on a strict time budget. In addition, in many churches in Central America, there is more time to venture on side trips without totally derailing the worship “hour.” Worship services are longer in duration, and there is greater opportunity for the preacher to interact with the congregation, which is energizing and helps to keep listeners engaged. Still, in all contexts preaching must be biblical.

Resources abound, including innumerable books, websites, seminars, conferences and retreats, all with the goal of helping preachers hone their craft. These resources sometimes conflict with one another, of course, because the “experts” are far from uniform in their perspectives regarding method and message. I enjoy reading books of sermons, letting the printed word speak to me. I admire the creative ways that some preachers paint verbal pictures. Even more, I appreciate in-depth hermeneutics that reflect solid exegetical work, and when a liberating interpretive insight causes me to exclaim, “why did I not see that!”

However, the more immersed I became in researching the topic of preaching, the more one particular thought plagued me. These tools of the trade, techniques, and strategies in the “art” of preaching are forever out of reach for my neighbors. They lack physical access to these tools, but even more importantly, they lack the academic skills to make sense of them. Trying to teach, even verbally, methods and techniques that presume literacy on the part of the learner would hurt more than it would help. For example,

simply trying to explain Eugene Lowry's methods for sermon development⁷⁸ would be completely beyond their comprehension because it presumes a high level of literacy (truthfully, it is out of reach for many literate preachers). No, most of what I read, even the most nuts-and-bolts recipes for a rudimentary "three points and a poem" sermon, is beyond their reach. There are too many prerequisites to be satisfied.

To illustrate just how taken for granted is the presumption that preachers will at least know how to read, I conducted in-person interviews with two preaching experts, both with PhDs, both who teach homiletics in a theological seminary. When I explained the task before me, both reacted similarly. "How can an illiterate person possibly preach?" That was my first reaction as well, and I still ask the question. However, after getting to know my friends and neighbors who have heard the call to serve the Lord, I believe that there must be a solution.

A chasm separates those who have been privileged with a seminary education, or even a secondary education, and the "majority world," which includes brothers and sisters who, for a multitude of reasons lack essential skills, including knowing how to read. Consequently, even if all other obstacles could be removed (e.g. transportation, finances), they are excluded from traditional theological education. The answer is not a matter of those with 'superior' academic credentials telling the 'inferior' what to believe and what to say. What should occur, if we are to live as the one resurrected body of Christ, is to give "according to [what] one has... it is a question of fair balance between

⁷⁸ Eugene Lowry, *How to Preach a Parable: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form, Revised*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000). "The sermon will begin with a discrepancy, a conflict, an ambiguity needing resolution," 33. This "'plot' should never turn out quite as the hearer anticipates. The listener needs to endure the suspense, and await the turn of events that provides an answer to the 'riddle'", 24.

your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need” (2Cor 8:12-14). Implicit in these verses are two important principals. First, that we share from our “abundance” when there is a need, and second, that there may come a time when we are the ones in need, and they share with us from their abundance.

My academic training allows me to offer something, but my neighbors teach me also. In other words, our relationships are reciprocal, and we are equals. The Bible reminds us that none of us owns the answers but by searching together, we might find some of them, for the benefit of all. Therefore, while I enjoyed much of what I read for my own personal benefit, I found little to specifically address the immediate task at hand, particularly when it comes to method.

I needed to find my way back to the basics, so that I could help Hilario find his way as well. More helpful were books that did not pretend to teach homiletics methodologically, but which approached the topic conceptually. Most notable is *The Witness of Preaching*, by Thomas G. Long. A series of essays by homileticians from diverse backgrounds, compiled under the title *What’s the Matter With Preaching Today?*⁷⁹ is also helpful. Finally, investigating the subject of “orality,” with which I first became acquainted by participating in online discussions as part of the 2004 Lausanne Forum on World Evangelization,⁸⁰ I identified helpful resources that might have practical application to teaching preaching to learners with limited academic experience. These and other resources will be referred to in the “Project Design” chapter, where the task of

⁷⁹ The book’s title comes from an essay published in Harper’s Magazine in July 1928, written by famed preacher Harry Emerson Fosdick.

⁸⁰ “Orality” is frequently referred to as “storytelling” by missionaries utilizing orality among non-literates, but since homileticians also use the term, often interchangeably with “narrative preaching,” to avoid confusion, I use the term “orality” for ministry to oral learners.

teaching preaching in context is discussed in detail. Here, I will focus primarily on Long's *The Witness of Preaching*, with additional references to *What's the Matter with Preaching Today?*

Long evaluates what he calls "images" that shape how a preacher executes his or her role. These images are "clustered around three 'master' metaphors: the *herald*, the *pastor*, and the *storyteller/poet*."⁸¹ The herald views preaching as the "direct address of God," emphasizing the "divine role" so strongly that the "human side of the ledger threatens almost to disappear."⁸²

The pastor's point of reference begins with the "human dilemma ... and turns to the Bible as resource." The pastoral approach was popularized by famed preacher Harry Emerson Fosdick, who "attacked the dull, Bible-lesson style of preaching in vogue in his day, and countered with a concept of preaching that helps people resolve personal dilemmas."⁸³ The pastor's sermons become words of healing that address real human needs.

The "storyteller/poet" pays

just as much attention to scriptures as do herald preachers.... They would also claim to be at least as alert to the hearers' needs as the pastoral preachers, because they recognize the kind of communication listeners want and need. What do listeners want and need in sermons? Stories and images. We remember in stories, dream in stories, shape our values through stories.... after the sermon is forgotten, many hearers can still recall the stories and remember the images. It is no accident that it is said of Jesus that 'he did not speak to them except in parables,' a story built on a metaphor (Mk 4:34).⁸⁴

⁸¹ Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 19.

⁸² Long, 20.

⁸³ Long, 31.

⁸⁴ Long, 39.

Preaching is a sacred task, and pastors that remember this recognize the importance of it to the spiritual health of the community. They may feel pressure to perform, perceiving that their congregation compares their preaching to that of a mega-church superstar on television, suspecting that they come up short, at least in style. There may be those in the pew who would be satisfied if their sermons are “simply lively, engaging, and not boring,” but faithful pastors also know that “congregations desperately need preaching of substance.”⁸⁵ Viewing the sacred task from a position of perceived inferiority places pressure on many preachers; however, the reality is that,

the church is sustained most of all by the kind of careful, responsible, and faithful preaching that falls within the range of most of us. In this regard, preaching is a little like cooking. There are, to be sure, a few five-star chefs whose gourmet meals dazzle and delight... but no one eats a steady diet of five-star meals.⁸⁶

What most preachers “cook” then, are the dietary staples that sustain life; which in Central America are rice and beans.

Preachers, says Long, “are not visitors from clergy-land, strangers from an unknown land, ambassadors from seminary-land, or even... prophets from a wilderness land.”⁸⁷ Instead, “we come to the place of preaching... from the congregation, and we share their faith, but we also share their failings. We have no more right to be in the pulpit than anyone else in the congregation.”⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Long, 12.

⁸⁶ Long, 14.

⁸⁷ Long, 3.

⁸⁸ Long, 8.

Long turns his attention to one more “image” of a preacher, that of *witness*, an image “more suited than any of the others to disclose the true character of Christian preaching.”⁸⁹ He cites the courtroom motif employed by Isaiah 43:8-10, which says,

Bring forth the people who are blind, yet have eyes, who are deaf, yet have ears! Let all the nations gather together, and let the peoples assemble.... Let them bring their witnesses to justify them, and let them hear and say, ‘It is true.’ You are my witnesses, says the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he.

Exploring this courtroom trial motif, Long observes:

A trial is designed to get at the truth, and the people have a vested interest in the truth. In order to get at the truth, a witness is brought to the stand to testify. Now this witness is in every way one of the people, but he or she is placed on the stand because of two credentials: the witness has seen something, and the witness is willing to tell the truth about it.... If the witness lies—bears false witness—the ability of the people to discover the truth will suffer a grievous blow.⁹⁰

Four important attributes of a witness appearing in the courtroom are implied in this passage:

1. The witness is not a volunteer, not just anyone who comes forward to give testimony, but only the one who is *sent* to testify.
2. The testimony... is not about the global meaning of human existence but about God’s claim upon life. It is Yahweh who is witnessed to in the testimony.
3. The purpose of the testimony is proclamation to all peoples. It is on behalf of the people... that the testimony is made.
4. The testimony is not merely one of words but rather demands a total engagement of speech and action. The whole life of the witness is bound up in the testimony.⁹¹

A preacher becomes a witness by “wrestling” with the biblical text. The preacher goes to the Bible “listening for a voice... hoping for the claim of God to be

⁸⁹ Long, 45.

⁹⁰ Long, 47.

⁹¹ Paul Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, Lewis S. Mudge, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 131. In Long, 46.

encountered.”⁹² Thus the authority of the preacher comes not from his or her eloquence, position of authority, or academic credentials; rather, “the authority... comes from being ‘sworn in’ as a witness.”⁹³

As with the other images of preacher, the “witness image carries with it guidance about the rhetorical form of preaching.”⁹⁴ The witness is charged with finding the best way to “convey the event the witness has heard and seen”⁹⁵—there is no one way to do it. The “witness” image releases the preacher from the confines of a particular style, while preserving biblical preaching as normative, for “preaching is biblical whenever the preacher allows a text from the Bible to serve as the leading force in shaping the content and purpose of the sermon.”⁹⁶ This is of significant value to me in terms of teaching biblical hermeneutics (wrestling with the text), and homiletics (cooking rice and beans).

Long shares words of wisdom regarding sermon preparation and delivery that are useful for any preacher to remember, regardless of experience or academic preparation. A witness swears to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. In other words, a witness cannot withhold her testimony. For a person sensing the conviction of having been called to preach, the “witness” image is a reassuring one. Witnesses are obligated to testify, and to do so as truthfully as possible. With this image as a starting point, the preacher is aware of her job: to see, hear, and testify. Then it becomes a matter of finding a way to do it.

⁹² Long, 47.

⁹³ Long, 48.

⁹⁴ Long, 49.

⁹⁵ Long, 49.

⁹⁶ Long, 52.

For me, it is presumptuous for a person to ascend the pulpit and claim to represent God as witness before the congregation without at least a rudimentary understanding of exegesis and hermeneutics, but it occurs frequently. The reasons are multiple, but this is why in this thesis project I have paired hermeneutics and homiletics as inseparable tasks in preparation for pastoral ministry. Otherwise, a preacher gets up and preaches... all sorts of things that do not necessarily have anything to do with the text in his hand or the people looking to him for a word that they can take home. A text is taken out of context, and at times mutilated beyond recognition. The deficiency of content is disguised by pounding the lectern, jumping up and down, waving the Bible, and getting the people to shout “amen.”

Even without a seminary degree, preachers can do better. Simply by being cognizant of the complexities of translating from Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic into contemporary languages, simply by having a general awareness of the process of canon formation, even without knowing the details about debates, conflicts, and customs of the culture from which the biblical text emerged, awareness of these dynamics ought to make a preacher approach the task more responsibly, more humbly, knowing his or her limitations, knowing when to say “I don’t know,” and at the very least, taking the task of Bible study more seriously. Those are the goals of the introductory courses, to help the *witness* see, hear, and testify, for “to be a preacher is to be entrusted with the task of speaking the one word that humanity most urgently and desperately needs to hear, the glad tidings of God’s redemption through Jesus Christ.”⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Long, 13.

I am hopeful that Hilario can do this. He can be God's witness among his people, proclaiming glad tidings of great joy. If so, lives could be transformed. Even those individuals who sign their name with an "X" have access to the Bible through technology. An oral learner can listen to a Bible recording over and over, learn to identify the pericope of a passage, and possibly even compare it to other passages of Scripture. They can elicit the help of a friend or family member who does read, who can consult a concordance. One pastor, who openly admits that he can neither read nor write, tells me that his wife reads the Bible to him. Together they discuss the meaning of the text, and a framework for a sermon emerges.⁹⁸ Out of necessity, by working together they have found a creative way to overcome individual limitations.

Long stresses the importance of images and experiences in sermons, something most preachers across the spectrum can agree upon. Even for sophisticated, highly literate listeners, illustrations and stories are important. It is consistent with the image of preacher as witness, and just as importantly, consistent with the way that Jesus often told stories. If Hilario can connect stories to his sermons, things he remembers from life on Rama Cay, in the bush, stories from Rama traditions and culture, this could be an effective means of showing, through stories, that God is with them. After all, it is the stories from the sermon that they will most remember.

For instance, a lesson on the sacrament of baptism could begin with a story about a family with a newborn, and the different opinions of family members regarding baptism, based upon the family's religious tradition, as to whether the infant should be

⁹⁸ As is often the case, behind-the-scenes participants often go unrecognized for their contributions. I told this couple that they were really co-pastors, even if she never got acknowledged as such, because he could not do what he does without her. She was very pleased with this idea, and it was a thought that had never occurred to her before.

baptized. This would “engage the learners at a concrete relational, existential, and pastoral level,”⁹⁹ after which theological and doctrinal concepts could be taught. The lesson, or sermon, starts with concrete examples, and transitions (if it does) to the abstract. Here, Fosdick’s advice on topical preaching is relevant. He gives as an example of a topical sermon regarding “joy.” A preacher “ought not start with joy in the fifth century B.C. nor with joy as a subject to be lectured on, but with the concrete difficulties in living joyfully,” as actually experienced by people. A “real sermon must do more than discuss joy—it must produce it.”¹⁰⁰

It is a long, long, way from Riverside Church in New York City to the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, but Fosdick’s advice from almost a century ago agrees with the recommendations of contemporary orality advocates—start with the concrete. Ironically, despite the literary artistry and sophistication of storytellers such as Lowry, whose narrative sermons “begin with a discrepancy, a conflict, an ambiguity needing resolution”¹⁰¹ and where the “listener needs to... await the turn of events that provides an answer to the ‘riddle,’”¹⁰² it all boils down to a memorable story.

David Bartlett’s answer to the question, “what’s the matter with preaching today?” echoes the others. Bartlett contends that “preaching is always show-and-tell time, and that showing is at least as important as telling.”¹⁰³ He observes that, in most sermons “sin appears more interesting than grace, evil more lively than goodness.” It is easier to

⁹⁹ Sam Chan, “Storytelling Seeking Understanding” (International Orality Network Consultation: Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary, June 11-13, 2013), 2, accessed November 23, 2016, <https://orality.net/content/?authors=sam-chan>.

¹⁰⁰ Harry Emerson Fosdick, in Mike Graves, ed., *What’s the Matter with Preaching Today?* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 16. Fosdick expresses disdain for topical sermons in general.

¹⁰¹ Lowry, 33

¹⁰² Lowry, 24.

¹⁰³ David L. Bartlett, in Graves, 33.

“*show* evil,” which makes it more memorable, but we then “tell *about* goodness. We *show* judgment and then *talk about* the doctrine of mercy.”¹⁰⁴

The orality movement says, tell stories; the storyteller/poet says, tell stories; and so do most other homileticians. Stories are what people most remember, a fact that crosses the boundaries of literacy for both preacher and listener.

Long gives more credit to the congregation than do many, which is refreshing. Rather than worrying excessively about a catchy introduction in order to grab the listeners’ attention, “most hearers... come to the moment of the sermon with an air of expectancy and a genuine readiness to listen.”¹⁰⁵ Introductions are important, and they “should make a promise that the hearers are likely to want kept,”¹⁰⁶ keeping in mind that, as Fosdick famously quipped, no one but the perhaps preacher comes “desperately anxious to discover what happened to the Jebusites.”¹⁰⁷ People come to hear the truthful testimony of a credible witness.

Long also compares extemporaneous preaching to preaching from outlines and manuscripts. He points out that “the careful advance selection of apt words, phrases, and images for sermons is an act of ministry” and preferable to a “sloppy and haphazard use of language that can result when we search for wording on our feet.”¹⁰⁸ Outlines or manuscripts can help the preacher organize and present a cohesive, flowing message.

I prefer to prepare a manuscript, because I like to carefully craft the way I say things. Besides, I do not know what I want to say until after the thoughts have flowed

¹⁰⁴ Bartlett, 25.

¹⁰⁵ Long, 173.

¹⁰⁶ Long, 181.

¹⁰⁷ Fosdick, 10.

¹⁰⁸ Long, 227.

from my mind to my fingertips and finally onto a keyboard. It is not until I have that first draft written that I have a good sense of direction for a sermon. Although I almost always have written a manuscript, I do not always preach from one. In the process of drafting it, I am pulling together the results of my research and necessarily reflecting on the exegetical and hermeneutical process, as well as the biblical text, all over again. By the time I have the manuscript written, I have “heard” the message multiple times. Before I preach, I will have rehearsed it, which allows me to concretize my thoughts and work out the kinks.

At the same time, “hearing a preacher preach to a stack of papers rather than to the hearers is deadly,”¹⁰⁹ and that is difficult to refute. This may simply reflect an insecurity on the part of the preacher, which can and should be overcome. As to the other extreme—preaching extemporaneously—while there is an “undeniable authenticity and immediacy when the preacher speaks directly to the listeners,” it is a difficult skill to master, especially considering the demands competing for the pastor’s time. Further, if a sermon is “loose, rambling, and content starved”¹¹⁰ there is little advantage to it. In the end, the “church finally does not need to experience the presence of the preacher; it needs rather to hear the claims of the Christian faith *through* the preacher.”¹¹¹

Nonetheless, the matter of preaching—witnessing—extemporaneously, for reasons already mentioned, is the default option for non-literate preachers. In fact, for them, there may be no other alternative. If the non-literate preacher is ministering in a primarily oral-based culture, perhaps extemporaneous preaching is even better, as it demonstrates to the listener that God can even equip someone who is like them.

¹⁰⁹ Long, 227.

¹¹⁰ Long, 227.

¹¹¹ Long, 228.

Therefore, considering my preference for manuscripts, among many other things, I am disadvantaged when it comes to helping non-literates find their way to effectively witness. I am hopelessly literate; I have much to overcome in order to be helpful to Hilario and his congregation. The diversity of opinions found in my research helps (including the results of a survey on preaching, which will be reported in the next chapter) to challenge me on my presuppositions and to find ways to overcome them, so that I may help others. At the same time, the sometimes-conflicting conclusions among the experts indicate that no single problem can be identified, so no single “solution” exists. Furthermore, Fosdick’s question posed almost one hundred years ago still is relevant, revealing that the perception that something is wrong is a perennial one. Consensus only exists regarding the need for biblical preaching, although there are differing opinions as to what “biblical” means, too.

My challenge, then, is to help Hilario prepare to witness, so that he can rise confidently from the congregation, stand in the pulpit, and tell the truth about what he has seen and heard. For in the end, as one preacher told me when I interviewed him for this project, preaching boils down to “having something to say and finding a way to say it.” In other words, it is a matter of learning to cook rice and beans.

IV. PROJECT DESIGN

As Archbishop Romero reminds us, “it is very easy to be servants of the word without disturbing the world” by preaching a “word that can sound in any part of the world because it belongs to no part of the world.”¹ The word that Hilario preaches needs to “sound” in his part of the world; it needs to belong to the world of the Rama people of San Juan de Nicaragua. The “Word became flesh and lived among” the people of first century Palestine, and that same active, living Word continues to sound within the real-life circumstances of people around the world. A flesh-and-blood, incarnational word is badly needed in the Rama neighborhood today, and that is the goal behind this thesis project, to help Hilario McCrea John preach a living word which will breathe new life into the hearts and minds of his people.

Teaching Hermeneutics and Homiletics to Non-Literate Learners

Before delving further into project design and implementation, I wish to explain why I chose to incorporate both hermeneutics and homiletics into this project, and not just one or the other, which, quite frankly, would have been a lot less work.

On the one hand, stated negatively, my conclusion that hermeneutics and homiletics must be integrated—or at least that homiletics ought never be taught before hermeneutics—is in reaction to the preaching I have listened to while visiting churches in Latin America over the past twelve years, as well as to radio and television broadcasts. It

¹ Oscar Arnulfo Romero, in Sobrino, Jon, *Archbishop Romero: Memories and Reflections* (New York: Maryknoll, 1990), 20.

is by no means universal, but it is pervasive.² For some, it seems, “do not worry beforehand about what you are to say; but say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit” (Mark 13:11)³ means that the Holy Spirit provides the words for the preacher-oracle, and therefore advance preparation, academic or otherwise, is not necessary. The misuse of this verse demonstrates the dangers of ignoring context, and it is a classic example of *eisegesis*. It demonstrates the importance of reading—or hearing—the entire pericope, which clearly leans toward a different interpretation, i.e. “they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them” (Mark 13:9). The verse is not directed at preachers; rather, it reassures those who face persecution because of their faith.

Positively-defined reasons originate with my seminary experience. In seminary, I was introduced to the world of biblical criticism, which transformed my understanding of the Bible. Inspired teaching, access to quality exegetical resources, and hard work combined to transform this public speaker (skills acquired as an undergraduate and in business) into a biblical preacher.

The “a-hah” moment came in the first semester of an introductory course to the Old Testament, as Dr. Samuel E. Balentine introduced the class to the world of biblical criticism. Scholars may poke holes in Julius Wellhausen’s Documentary Hypothesis, for

² This is not the case only in Latin America; and many of the broadcasts originate in the USA. The difference is, generally in the USA people have more choices along the denominational and theological spectrums. A local pastor even of a small rural church, at least among prominent dominations, is likely to have attended seminary. Therefore, people seeking a church with solid doctrine and preaching have greater ability to find one or more churches who meet that requirement. They may *choose* to attend a Word of Faith church, but it is not the default, or even a prominent, option.

³ Also Matt 10:19 and Luke 12:11.

example, but the basic concept makes sense. It explains that jarring sensation I would feel whenever, for example, the tone of a text changes abruptly, or a story (such as the creation or flood narratives) repeats. Source criticism also helps to explain why parts of Daniel are written in Hebrew, parts in Aramaic, and why some sections appear to be historical narrative, while others are apocalyptic. Dr. F. Scott Spencer explained why so much of *Mark* is repeated by *Matthew* and *Luke*, but not by *John*, and why the *Revelation* is not as complicated as it often is made out to be.

I was hooked on exegesis, the fascinating world of biblical criticism, and how it can illuminate—and at times confuse—our hermeneutics. These classroom experiences made me realize that, even though the Bible is a compilation of oral traditions and writings, some of which date back thousands of years, we are just beginning to scratch the surface of what still remains to be discovered. The book is a subversive document, and it can transform our relationships with the Creator and one another, if we let it breathe, rather than dogmatically insisting on wooden interpretations of it.

In seminary, instead of confusion and doubt, I found clarity on some matters, began asking new questions on others, while at the same time becoming acutely aware of how much I did not, and still do not know about the Bible. I felt frustrated, betrayed even, that this world had been locked up inside the halls of academia with very little trickling down into church Sunday School literature or just about anything available at the local Christian bookstore. What were the “powers that be” afraid of? A revolution in the pews, another reformation perhaps? These experiences led me to consider hermeneutics a top priority in theological education, even for non-literate learners. After all, it had transformed my understanding of the Bible, which in turn transformed me. I want Hilario,

and others like him, to have their minds renewed and transformed as well, to become *biblical* preachers that have something to say that is from God, and to say it effectively and truthfully.⁴

What works for one individual might not for another, however. I had initially assumed that ‘somewhere’ along the way, the results of our work in biblical studies would spill naturally over into homiletics. If we keep excavating long enough, I reasoned, he will unearth something that needs to be said and find a way to say it. I presumed that his homiletical skills would evolve on their own. This is not to imply that my homiletical training was unnecessary; if the opportunity presents itself, I will gladly go back for more. However, before even stepping into my first class in homiletics, I could already write, and I could already speak in public.

Therefore, based upon my own experiences, I initially did not believe that we would need an entire series of workshops devoted just to preaching. After all, I know that Hilario has heard preaching before. He has heard me preach; he listens regularly to preachers on Christian radio and television. He has heard preachers in his village. I have shown him numerous video recordings of biblically sound preaching, on the assumption that observation would be the default means of learning for someone with limited formal education. If much of what I consider to be “bad” preaching⁵ is learned by the show-and-tell method, I assumed, then good preaching can be learned that way, too.

⁴ James Somerville, co-founder of A Sermon for Every Sunday preaching website, “Great preaching depends on two things: 1) having something to say, and 2) finding a way to say it. In my experience, many preachers move on to part 2 of the operation before they have completed part 1, and as a consequence find beautiful ways of saying almost nothing,” email July 14, 2015.

⁵ This is more a criticism of the theology behind the message than of the way a sermon is crafted or delivered.

On one visit to San Juan de Nicaragua, we had scheduled a time for worship in Hilario's home. We previously had been discussing the problem of factions within the Rama community, and I referred to the words of Jesus, "every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand" (Matt 12:25, Mark 3:24-25, Luke 11:17).⁶ He asked me to preach on that verse; I suggested that he do it. After all, as one of them, he was in a better position to address the needs of the people. He agreed. We began worship with prayer and song, then the Bible reading, after which he rose, stood in the "pulpit" and began his sermon—which lasted about sixty seconds. He was done almost before he started! Perhaps he thought at the time that the Holy Spirit would give him the words? Whatever the case may have been, there was a lesson in this for both of us.

Hilario's second attempt at preaching was in December 2015 at a Christmas worship service. The Rama of the Indian River had not celebrated Christmas as a community in several years. Some tell me it is because no one could remember the words to the Christmas hymns, and without singing carols, it would not be Christmas. If we were going to celebrate Christmas, we needed a choir, so I hand wrote multiple copies of the verses I could remember of Joy to the World, Silent Night, O Little Town of Bethlehem, and a few others. Eight of us formed a little choir, and we practiced for three days before the big event.

The police commander gave the Rama permission to use a former restaurant, which had been confiscated when its owner was sent to prison for drug trafficking.

⁶ The Lukan account includes an interesting twist: "every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert."

Several youths decorated the open-air salon with balloons and tropical flowers. Built on piers jutting into the Indian River, it was a gorgeous sight. Some of the ladies made sweet buns. Excitement filled the air. However, the date was set for the 22nd, and evidently, there was some concern about celebrating Christmas on a day other than the 24th or 25th of December. By this time, Hilario had completed the hermeneutics workshops. Some of what he had learned had an impact on this, his second preaching event. He addressed the concerns about the date in his message, which was considerably longer than the first. I did not record the entire message, which lasted about three minutes, but I did record the part where he reassures them that, even though we were not celebrating Christmas on the 25th, it did not matter:

For why reason? We know in this month, but we don't know the date. For why reason, because when King Herod, he send his soldiers them to kill up all the baby from one year to two year, for what the write them of history them, he to write, them what didn't have the chance to write, that the moment or that the day, when Jesus born. So 23 we celebrate, 24 or 25 celebrate, but that's not the day. I think what is the deal is that Herod son we celebrate. Because that was the leader and he no want nobody else come up beside him. So I think we safe. Thank you.

I admit to having flinched a little, but then I chuckled. He was attempting to interpret a historical context and apply it to the immediate context of the congregation. Obviously, we have more work to do in hermeneutics. Maybe Hilario's preaching abilities would evolve eventually, given enough time, but if he is going to get into the pulpit anytime soon, we would also need to take a more direct route.

Project Overview

Since this project is part of a larger initiative to establish an indigenous church in San Juan de Nicaragua, research has encompassed this broader perspective, the results of

which much has been reported in preceding chapters. Aside from construction of a church building (the “easy part,” which almost three years later is just now getting a roof), the immediate task at hand is to prepare Hilario McCrea John to serve with excellence in the ministry of preaching as the church’s founding pastor.

How might the Holy Spirit work in and through the process of raising up an indigenous church to lead the Rama to spiritual wholeness, and to become the people that God created them to be? How can the church—a church of their own, led by one of their own—help to them reclaim their culture and traditions? Hilario had asked me to be his professor, sensing instinctively that a call to serve is also a call to prepare. We both agreed that the place to begin was with the Bible, a book he reveres, but has difficulty reading, and for that reason has had to rely on the word of others. As I assist Hilario in his preparation for vocational ministry, I am reminded that those “who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (Jas 3:2). This applies to me as well as it does to Hilario.

As the immediate context of this project is theological education for ministers who are non-literate or who possess limited academic experience, my work with Hilario McCrea John serves as a test case which might benefit other ministers who are similarly situated in terms of literacy and academic preparation.⁷ The question of literacy needs to be addressed, particularly in designing the content and delivery of the series of workshops, which will be described below. On the one hand, I wish to avoid oversimplification of content; literacy is not an indicator of intelligence and ability to process sophisticated concepts. Illiteracy indicates, more than anything else, lack of opportunity.

⁷ Daniel Sheard, *An Orality Primer for Missionaries* (self-published, 2007), 8. “For most Western missionaries trained in a literate tradition, the first and fundamental issue is to **break the sound barrier**. This barrier is the inability to teach and *relate* orally.”

Finding a way to deliver content so that it can be understood and synthesized by a non-literate learner is one of the challenges we need to address.⁸

I recognize that the theological perspectives of “dead European males”⁹ and their Euro-American descendants have significantly influenced my own academic studies. They are by no means the only valid perspectives in theology, though. In fact, I firmly believe that the more we listen to voices from the margins—all margins—the more we the Church reflect the image of our Creator. Those dead European males should occupy seats at the discussion table, but so should many others. To that end, I wish to avoid placing obstacles in front of Hilario that could interfere with his ability to hear a word from God for his people. That word for his people may help the rest of us as well.

At the same time, for whatever reason, God has called me to participate, to mentor, teach, and encourage. I believe that I, and all that this one-letter word represents, still have something to contribute. My thoughts, life experiences, academic preparation, even culture, add to the conversation. Suffice it to say that there is a delicate, at times elusive, balance between my own experiences and the unique cultural, socio-political, and ethnic context of Hilario and the Rama. I have not found a self-help book explaining just how to achieve that balance, so we move forward, relying on communication and transparency between Hilario and myself, trusting the Holy Spirit for clarity and guidance in the process.

⁸ Sam Chan, “Storytelling Seeking Understanding,” International Orality Network Consultation: Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary, June 11-13, 2013, 1, accessed March 28, 2015, <https://orality.net/content/storytelling-seeking-understanding>. Chan recommends that “orality” concepts be taught to literates, so that they might be better equipped to communicate with non-literates.

⁹ Juan Francisco Martinez, in Eldin Villafañe, *Beyond Cheap Grace: A Call to Radical Discipleship, Incarnation, and Justice* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 53. In response to Villafañe’s essay “*El Verbo fue Hecho Carne*,” Martinez observes that theological education in the western world needs to become less reflective of “dead European males,” and make room for alternate voices.

Project Research and Design

Early in my research, I sought to identify “best practices” in church planting with the hope that they might provide useful direction for the church project. Surely this has been done many times, and my job would be easier if I could just follow someone else’s blueprint. However, I quickly abandoned this approach, as I realized that what might work in Timbuktu will not necessarily work in Nicaragua, and what might work even among *mestizo* Nicaraguans, could be rejected by the indigenous Rama for whom part of their identity is in not being “Spanish.” Besides, the Rama identify with the Moravian Church, so a basic framework of how they envision “doing church” is already in place.

The goal that the Rama Indigenous Church be “indigenous” has direct implications for this project, which is to help equip her indigenous pastor for the preaching ministry. First, as Hilario’s mentor, I must guard against transmitting my own cultural, theological, and ethnic presuppositions as “gospel.” I have been warned, by Paul in his letter to the Galatians, by George Tinker in his historical account of the missionary conquest of the Americas, and by own eyewitness accounts on the mission field, including the mistakes I have made in cross-cultural ministry over the past twelve years.

I also hope to encourage the Rama to critically evaluate their own religious traditions, for not everything Moravian is indigenous, or necessarily even God-ordained. Hopefully, they can resist the temptation to simply recreate some romanticized version of church on Rama Cay. Still, it is their church, so I will try to refrain from attempting to shape *their* church into *my* image; really, it is God’s church, so it is his job to breathe life into her and shape her into *his* own image.

Naturally, as a “hopelessly literate” learner, I sought counsel in books, periodicals, and the Internet.¹⁰ They provide insight, but also confuse matters, partly because the printed word presumes a level of literacy beyond that of Hilario or many of my other pastor friends in the region. Instead of finding answers, I ended up with more questions, particularly with regards to teaching homiletics. I needed a way to help Hilario kick off his preaching ministry, without bogging him down in the “best practices” as identified by the literate world.

The challenge set forth before me, as I see it, is to simplify the process, to simplify sermon development, style and delivery without sacrificing message. In U.S. currency, two quarters can be expressed as one-half dollar, five dimes, ten nickels, or the smallest denomination, fifty pennies. And yet, all of these expressions still equal the same amount. Therefore, I assume that the same could be done—needs to be done—with preaching. How can we reduce to pennies the process of sermon development from preparation to delivery, and have the end result still be a “biblical” sermon?

While books were not particularly helpful in answering that question, a few clues were to be found. First and foremost, Long’s image of preacher as *witness* provides a conceptual model around which to frame both the calling and the responsibility of a preacher, as discussed in the previous chapter. Second, the limited resources I consulted regarding communications in orally-based cultures agree that people from oral cultures tend toward deductive rather than inductive reasoning, moving from concrete to abstract, whereas much instruction in academia works from the opposite end of the spectrum. As I

¹⁰ Sheard, 11. “It behooves the missionary... To bow his or her head and first ask God to overcome the alphabet.”

attempt to provide theological training to someone from an orally-based culture who will be preaching to oral learners, I must consider these differences, not only with regards to content but also delivery of that content.

Another pedagogical challenge presented in this context involves how to measure results. What are the results to be measured, even? Obviously, asking for a written essay regarding the “Synoptic Problem” is out of the question. Even simple “true/false” or “yes/no” quizzes could be intimidating, and of doubtful usefulness. The goal is not to shame the learner by shining a spotlight on academic deficiencies. Even an oral exam might do that, and while I may occupy the professor chair in this specific context, Hilario and I are equal partners in this, and I will not submit my brother to cross examination. This leaves me with observation and ongoing conversation as the primary means of gauging comprehension, with the final outcome—the preaching event—as the principal measure of “success.”

The goal of both sets of workshops is similar. The objective is not to teach Hilario—or anyone else—to stand in the pulpit as oracle and proclaim “thus saith the Lord.” The call of the preacher is, as Long asserts, to stand before the people and preach an incarnational word that they need to hear, to provide testimony as a *witness* that has been called to the stand. To help Hilario learn to *witness* effectively, I developed a series of six workshops on biblical interpretation.¹¹ This is followed by workshops on homiletics, which integrate and reinforce key points of hermeneutics, while helping him to find his way to preach within the context of his people.

¹¹ I had developed the content of these workshops earlier, for work with pastor groups in Costa Rica, which have been modified based upon their feedback.

The workshops in both disciplines are not intended to be all encompassing, and the learner is not expected to be able to high jump over literacy barriers and lack of academic experience. There will remain much to explore afterwards of course; preparation is not a one-time event, but a lifelong calling. A summary of the workshops follows, with the “having something to say and finding a way to say it”¹² motif a straightforward way to express the initial segregation, and subsequent reintegration, of hermeneutics and homiletics.

Hermeneutics: “Having Something to Say”

Several books were consulted in preparation of the lesson materials for the hermeneutics workshops. They were chosen specifically because they avoid technical jargon, have been published in Spanish (some originating in the language), and are priced within the reach of individuals with limited economic resources. The printed lesson materials, which are in Spanish, are included in Appendix H. They are not repeated here; however, highlights are summarized below.

Lesson One: Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics

For someone who is called to preach, devotional reading is not enough. Ministers who have been called to a ministry of teaching and preaching should develop skills with which to study the Bible critically. These “investigative tools” increase our capacity to

¹² Dr. James Somerville, pastor of First Baptist Church, Richmond, and co-founder of “A Sermon for Every Sunday,” www.asermonforeverysunday.com, interviewed in Richmond, VA, August 1, 2015.

interpret and apply biblical principles in our lives and ministries, and to lead others to do the same.

1. Our responsibility is to serve God to the best of our ability, even as we acknowledge that we only “see in a mirror, dimly” (1Cor 13:12). Our calling as preachers and teachers is to guide and encourage others in their Christian walk, while remembering Jesus’ words of warning, “if any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea” (Mark 9:42, Matt 18:6, Luke 17:2). We need to sit at the feet of the Master, and learn alongside one another, trusting that the Holy Spirit will guide our steps.

2. Leaders charged with a teaching ministry, which includes preaching, are called to be faithful interpreters of Scripture, setting aside, as much as possible, personal feelings and agendas, seeking instead to hear truth through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not to justify actions of the church in the past or present, but to become more fully the people that God has called us to be. It is a sacred responsibility.

3. Biblical criticism does not mean “criticize” the Bible; it is a systematic, scholarly approach to studying the Bible. *Exegesis* is the process of investigation by which we seek to extract meaning from a biblical text. This is contrasted with *eisegesis*, that of assigning personal, denominational, or ecclesial meaning to a text in order to make it say what the interpreter (or church) wants it to say.

Lesson Two: Formation of the Biblical Canon

Even though the Bible is a collection of ancient writings, the Bible as we know it today is a relatively recent historical development, and yet, the Christian faith thrived, even before then. Only in the last few centuries has the Bible been widely available, and yet the gospel has spread throughout the world.

1. Key events led to the process of canon formation, and certain writings were included or excluded from the biblical canon—the writings the church accepts as being divinely inspired—based upon a specific set of criteria. Forgeries, apocryphal writings and early heresies such as gnosticism and Marcionism were motivating factors behind the canonization process, as were the deaths of the apostles and eye witnesses.
2. Theories are presented regarding the emergence of sacred literature, the process of evolving from original languages, oral tradition and multiple redactions, to translations into different languages. Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis is one example of these types of theories.
3. The centrality of Jesus Christ to the Christian faith versus the centrality of the Bible is discussed. What are the dangers of minimizing the relevance of the Bible versus elevating the Bible to the point of idolatry? What does that mean for people who speak a language into which the Bible has not yet been translated? Are there healthier ways to define the role of Holy Scripture in the life of the Christian church?

Lesson Three: Dangers of Erroneous Interpretations

Even with the establishment of the canon as the measuring stick to define orthodoxy and orthopraxy for the church, misinterpretations and even heresies still abound. Erroneous interpretations, whether intentional or not, can cause harm to the Body of Christ. The interpreter should work to guard against *eisegesis*, against proof-texting, or any other means that attempt to subject the Bible to personal, cultural, or ecclesial preferences.

1. The Bible is a collection of “books” written in different languages by multiple authors, speaking from within concrete circumstances, and over an extended period of time. Biblical criticism evaluates these factors in terms of how sacred literature should be interpreted. Literary styles within this collection of writings are diverse, and a proper reading takes this diversity into account. Poetry is not interpreted in the same way as historical narrative, just as a romantic novel would not be read as if it were a legal treatise. Figurative language represents an idea or concept, but is not meant to be interpreted as literal fact. Jesus used figurative language such as “salt and light,” which of course, no one *literally* is either, and he frequently exaggerated for effect; obviously, “if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out” (Mark 9:47) is not a command that Jesus expects us to follow, or we all would be bumping into one another.

2. Based upon what history has revealed, humility and submission to the Holy Spirit in the hermeneutical process are essential. We are all fallible human beings, but with God’s help we can build up the Body of Christ. First, we recognize our limitations and seek to overcome them through prayer and investigation, using to our best ability the

tools that are available to us. Second, we leave the door open to the possibility that someone else might be right, so we need to listen to, learn from, and sometimes simply disagree with others. Most importantly, we keep at the forefront the need for unity—which is not to be confused with uniformity—within the Body of Christ.

3. Erroneous interpretations, or blind dedication to dogma, can lead to disaster. One famous example is the condemnation by the Roman Catholic Church of the scientist Galileo Galilei, who confirmed the Copernican theory. Galileo was deprived of his freedom and his writings condemned. He could have been executed had he had not recanted, which he did. We know today that the “experts” were wrong in their literal interpretation of the Bible as scientific fact. Other examples include the doctrine of the “divine rights of kings,” which has been used by rulers to keep people subservient, lest they be accused of disobeying God. Scripture has been used to justify the enslavement of one human being by another, it has been manipulated by political powers to encourage extreme nationalism (examples from Nazi Germany and the USA) that elevates a nation, state, or ethnic group to an idolatrous status. Selected passages of Scripture, by ignoring context and other portions of the Bible which also speak to the matter, are still used to deny women the opportunity to fully utilize their spiritual gifts within many denominations.

4. Heresies continue to be a problem today, one prominent example being the “Word of Faith” movement, commonly referred to as the Prosperity Gospel. This heresy distorts the Bible to justify personal beliefs, preferences, or selfish desires. The simple act of naming and claiming what is written in Scripture, pronouncing the “word,” will *guarantee* its fulfillment for those who have sufficient “faith.” To be cured of an illness,

one simply needs to cash in on the words of Isaiah, “he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases... and by his bruises we *are* healed” (Isa 41:4-5, emphasis added). If, even after claiming the promise, a person continues to be ill, it is because he or she did not have enough faith to receive that healing. Wealth and prosperity are obtained by the same method of manipulating Scripture to suit the purposes of the believer. What does this heresy—which is broadcast all over Latin America—preach to someone who lives in poverty or is wrestling with chronic or terminal illness?

Lesson Four: The Gospels

Why are there *four* gospels, since they all tell the same basic story? Theories about the development of the gospels, and the reasons for differences between them are examined.

1. A chart comparing features of the four gospels side by side, indicating the audience for whom each had been written, the amount of material that is repeated among them, and the number of Old Testament citations in each. These differences, as well as similarities, should be considered in biblical interpretation. For example, the writer of *Matthew*, who wrote primarily for a Jewish audience, contains numerous references to the “kingdom of Heaven,” whereas *Mark*, even when recounting the same basic story, refers to the “kingdom of God.” Why? *Matthew* was written to Jews, who out of reverence, will not pronounce the name of God. However, this is not a problem for *Mark*, who wrote for a gentile audience, so “God” is named.
2. Why is virtually all of *Mark* repeated in *Matthew* and *Luke*? This distinction,

known as the “Synoptic Problem,” is based upon the improbability that two or three different authors would utilize virtually the same phraseology to describe a scene. If two individuals watch the same movie at the same time, and then are asked to tell about it, it is unlikely they would use the same words to do so. For this reason, scholars seek explanations for the similarities, and theories regarding common possible sources of information have developed.

3. *John* is the “non-synoptic” gospel. It is interesting that *John* repeats very little of what is contained in the other three gospels. In *John* there are no “miracles,” only “signs.” Some stories, such as the “wedding at Cana,” are unique to the fourth gospel. Only *John* recounts Jesus washing his disciples’ feet, while at the same time omitting the Last Supper. *John* also does not mention Jesus’ birth or baptism. The theme of Jesus’ “hour” runs throughout the gospel, beginning at Cana when his hour had not yet come (2:4) to when Jesus declares that his hour had arrived (John 17:1). The various “I am” proclamations; “before Abraham was, I am” (6:35), “I am the light of the world” (8:12), “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6), among others, are only found in *John*.

Lesson Five: Basic Steps of Exegesis

Adapted from the book *Formación Ministerial Indispensable: Herramientas y Consejos Prácticos Para el Ministerio*,¹³ (Indispensable Ministerial Formation: Tools and Practical Advice for the Ministry), a basic process for *exegesis* is presented, in

¹³ Guajardo, Alcides. *Formación Ministerial Indispensable: Herramientas y Consejos Prácticos para el Ministerio*, 2nd ed. (El Paso: Mundo Hispano, 2009), 33-34.

anticipation of the final part of the workshop, which will be a hands-on exercise in utilizing Bible commentaries and dictionaries.

1. The Christian exegete begins with basic presuppositions regarding biblical hermeneutics: a) just as the Holy Spirit inspired the biblical writers, the Holy Spirit illumines and guides the interpreter today; b) the Bible itself often provides interpretation, as a theme might occur in other passages, in other contexts, and by other writers; c) the context of a passage of Scripture matters, whether immediate, remote, historical, or present; d) Holy Scripture being “God breathed” means, among other things, that individual passages may be interpreted differently based upon the specific context in which it is heard. For example, circumcision is not a significant issue in the contemporary church (although in Africa, female “circumcision” certainly is), but the types of controversies involving circumcision within the early church, and the resolution of those controversies, still speak to controversies within the church today.

2. A basic system for *exegesis* includes reading a text and forming an initial interpretation based upon what is “heard,” re-reading the same texts in multiple translations and noting any differences, and finally, consulting commentaries and dictionaries for additional insight. Seek to ask and answer questions, such as who wrote the text, and for whom? Are there contextual factors (culture, beliefs, practices, socio-political environment, etc.) that help to explain why the text was written, and the message the writer intended to convey? Do the verses preceding or following the selected passage help to clarify (or confuse) the initial interpretation? Do you agree with the commentaries consulted, and why? Based upon your efforts to delve more deeply into the text, what have you learned? What is the message for you, your church, and the world?

Lesson Six: A Hands-On Exercise in Investigating Jonah

The final lesson of this introductory workshop culminates in a hands-on investigation of *Jonah* following the basic steps provided above. This book was selected for several reasons. First, the entire book is very brief. Second, it is dramatic, entertaining, and memorable. Jonah is called by God, and he rebels. He is swallowed by a great fish, which brings him to his knees in prayer. He is vomited onto dry land; God repeats his command to go to Nineveh, and Jonah reluctantly obeys. He preaches. The Ninevites repent, God relents, and this angers Jonah. Third, *Jonah* is amply sprinkled with supernatural claims which have resulted in controversy; the claims of *Jonah* are often cited by non-Christians as evidence of “errors” in the Bible, while at the same time it is used by Christians who insist on a literal interpretation as a litmus test as to whether someone else “believes” the Bible. Finally, it is rich in theological implications that often get overlooked, because of these peripheral controversies.

1. Multiple Bible translations, as well as commentaries and Bible dictionaries are supplied from our library, so participants gain a little experience in using them. These are briefly introduced before we begin.
2. Participants are given an outline on *Jonah* which includes suggested questions to ask of the text and the commentaries. For example, participants are encouraged to investigate the locations of Nineveh, Joppa, and Tarshish. Does geography shed any light on the story? What might we glean from the Bible and commentaries about Jonah the person? Aside from his complaint that God is “a gracious God and merciful, slow to

anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing” (4:2), what else might explain why Jonah detested the idea of preaching in Nineveh? How do the actions of the mariners, the Ninevite king, and the Ninevites compare to the actions of God's chosen messenger?

3. Based upon the earlier sessions, the type of literature that *Jonah* represents is discussed. Does its literary style influence our opinion regarding the historicity of the account? Do we *need* to believe that Jonah literally was swallowed whole by a giant fish, in order for the story to be “true?” Could this be one of those cases of where we can disagree about whether to accept the story literally or figuratively, and still be in agreement as to its central message?

4. Finally, what can we learn about the nature of God and what can we learn about human nature from this account? What are some possible implications for us, individually as children of God, and as leaders in our communities?

Homiletics: “Finding a Way to Say It”¹⁴

The preacher’s job is to *witness* to what God reveals in Scripture. The witness sees or hears something and is compelled to tell the truth about it. Truth cannot be kept a secret; it needs to be told. The “having something to say” component is hermeneutics; finding a way to effectively communicate that truth is homiletics. The witness is not only compelled to tell truth, but to tell it in a way that can be understood and accepted.

¹⁴ Unlike the hermeneutics workshops, which have been taught on previous occasions, and later adapted for the purposes of this project, the homiletics training was designed specifically for Hilario, with the hope of adapting it for additional learners.

The goal of these workshops is to “distill” the task of preaching, including sermon preparation, to a level which would be accessible to Hilario, without sacrificing essential content. That is a subjective matter, of course, given the diversity of opinion, among even well-regarded homileticsians as to “what’s the matter” with preaching today. I was not trying to further diagnose that perceived problem, though. I wanted to identify the essential elements that a sermon absolutely must have to be biblical, as well as the essential skills and qualities of the person who is called to the witness stand. I turned to practitioners, those who give testimony from the pulpit week after week, to see what they thought about the matter. I began by conducting personal interviews of preachers,¹⁵ but after five of these conversations, I quickly realized that time and distance would not allow me to continue with this approach. Therefore, I published a survey online, both in Spanish and in English. Beyond gathering a few demographic details for classification purposes, the survey sought opinions by asking mostly open-ended questions:

1. What are the essential qualities, talents, skills, etc. of an effective preacher?
2. What are the basic elements that a good sermon *must* have?
3. What resources (textbooks, website, etc.) would you recommend for sermon preparation and preaching?
4. What advice or encouragement would you share with someone who is new to ministry?

¹⁵ The first two interviews were with Tracy Hartman, Ph.D., Daniel O. Aleshire Professor of Homiletics and Practical Theology at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, and James Somerville, Ph.D., pastor of Richmond’s First Baptist Church, Richmond, Virginia. Hartman was my homiletics professor, interviewed July 9, 2015. Somerville is co-founder of the “A Sermon for Every Sunday” preaching website, interviewed August 1, 2015.

There were sixty-nine responses to the English-language survey and twenty to the Spanish-language version. Of each group, fifty-nine fully completed the English-language survey and thirteen completed the one in Spanish. The quantity of responses is insufficient for establishing empirical data, and the results may be skewed theologically based upon my decisions as to where to promote the surveys,¹⁶ but I was not looking to establish empirical data. I simply was seeking the opinions of people who spend time in the pulpit, which might help to refine our methods as we go forward.

The survey results (Appendix I) are indeed helpful, even if predictable in the sense that my own opinions mostly concur. There was overwhelming consensus that preaching should be biblical, truthful, include illustrations, and be relevant to the congregation. The responses also serve in a way I had not envisioned; the words of these preachers, mostly from the USA but also from Latin America and Europe, were words directed toward *Hilario*, an unknown soldier of God, a lone Indian deep inside the rainforest, who is training for the ministry. Since Hilario also represents countless other ministers with similar disadvantages regarding to access to education, the survey participants also speak to them. There is a solidarity in that, a reassurance that we are all connected in this together.

As the principal text for preparing lessons in homiletics, I was guided by *Principios de la Predicación*¹⁷ by Dr. Pablo A. Jiménez. Although the book assumes literacy on the part of the learner (it is a *book*), it is supplemented by a website dedicated

¹⁶ Links to the survey were published on social media groups, including an alumni group for Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, from which I received my M.Div. degree, and on a social media group for preachers who use the Narrative Lectionary. I additionally emailed the link to several preachers I know who are not social media users. For the Spanish-language version, I emailed the members of my doctor of ministry cohort and published a link on social media.

¹⁷ Pablo A. Jiménez, *Principios de Predicación* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003).

to the ministry of preaching, which includes sermon helps, outlines, and video lectures on sermon development. Two of the sessions were based primarily on the video lectures which are found on Jiménez' website,¹⁸ followed by discussion about those concepts which Hilario could easily apply as a beginner. I also included preaching videos from "A Sermon for Every Sunday,"¹⁹ which follows the Revised Common Lectionary. I prepared very few printed materials for the homiletics series.

Of course, all of these resources, including the videos, assume literacy on the part of the learner. For example, Jiménez emphasizes that the introduction and conclusion be written out completely, even if the rest of the sermon is preached only from an outline. Hilario *cannot* do these things, so I de-emphasized these same points, advising him not to worry about these technicalities, while focusing discussion on the points that he could employ in his preaching from the start.

For the purposes of these workshops, we focused on three principal concepts: the *structure* of a sermon, the *content* of the sermon, and the *delivery* of the sermon. Unlike the hermeneutics workshops, which were taught in Nicaragua over a span of several months, these sessions were conducted in our learning center in Arbolitos over the course of four days.

¹⁸ Jiménez, "Rudimentos del Sermón," accessed January 18, 2017, <http://drpablojimenez.com/2016/03/08/los-rudimentos-del-sermon>. Since Internet is becoming widely available throughout Latin America, and the technology required to access it more affordable, this site could be a valuable resource for formal training sessions, preferably with a facilitator.

¹⁹ www.asermonforeverysunday.com. The website features a variety of preachers, including well-known individuals such as Will Willamon and Brian McLaren, and numerous professors and skilled preachers. A diversity in style, both in sermon form and in delivery, is represented, but from a progressive theological perspective.

Sessions One and Two (Day One)

It had been six months since we last studied biblical criticism, so we began by reviewing the principles of hermeneutics and the most basic steps of exegesis. The goal was for Hilario to gain experience with a few reference materials. Since traveling by public boat to Nicaragua did not allow me to carry many books, in Arbolitos we could take exegesis a step further. Still, I had no expectation that Hilario would learn to utilize those resources within a few days, but rather appreciate that there are stories behind the stories we read in the Bible than can significantly influence interpretation.

During this first session, it became obvious that, if we were to meet the principal objectives of the homiletics training, I would have to modify the plan. For Hilario, locating a specific book, chapter, and verse in the Bible “on demand” is virtually impossible. Perhaps it is something we can work on in the future, but to continue to ask him to do it at this point would have discouraged him and frustrated me. Part of his difficulties derive from poor eyesight, but I suspect that many others, even those who can read at a basic level, would find it difficult to perform this “simple” task. Hilario *listens* to the Bible daily, or he has it read *to* him, but for the most part he does not *read* it. Consulting a concordance was similarly difficult, so we assigned that task to his daughter Doris, who had accompanied him.

To ensure that we would meet the objectives of the subsequent sessions, I made a few adjustments. Consulting a concordance, we developed a topically-arranged list of Bible verses, based on what Hilario believes his people most need to hear. Then, once he and his daughter retired to the guesthouse after dinner, I looked up those references and

prepared a list of Bible verses organized by those themes; one column in English and the other in Spanish, and then I printed them in 16-point type. Armed with fourteen pages of topically-organized Bible verses, I hoped to be better prepared for the following sessions.

Sessions Three and Four (Day Two)

What is the job of a preacher? Based on Long's book, we discussed the image of preacher as *witness*. A person who is called by God to preach is *compelled* to do so, and to tell the truth. Therefore, to find the courage to stand and preach is not a matter of acquiring a formal education, as valuable as that may be. It is a matter of having been called by God to the witness stand. The preacher's job is to tell the truth as carefully as possible. It does not require an academic degree, but it does require preparation. A call to serve is a call to prepare, which is a lifelong pursuit. I also shared the comments of the preachers who had responded to the survey, as they affirm the qualities of character that Hilario already possesses: that the person be truthful, respected, and know his congregation.

What are the *minimum* essential elements of a sermon? This topic is presented under three subheadings, sermon *structure*, sermon *content*, and sermon *delivery*.

1. Sermon Structure

It might seem odd to emphasize the importance of a sermon title as a minimum essential element, especially for a person preaching in an oral culture where there will be no bulletins or even overhead projections. However, in part to compensate for other

deficiencies such as preparing a sermon outline, it seems that defining a sermon title would help Hilario to articulate, even if only to himself, the main idea and purpose of his message. This has nothing to do with creative or catchy titles, it has to do with him articulating the message in a short phrase or sentence. Then, he can judge whether his sermon is congruent with the title. In addition, by maintaining a log of the title and related scripture passage, it will help him to track his preaching, and we can use that log to evaluate the sermons according to the four basic areas identified by Jiménez,²⁰ which are evangelism, discipleship, pastoral care, and prophetic challenge. For instance, we may find that most of the sermons preached fall into the “pastoral care” category. As a result, we look for ways to also preach the other areas.

The Jiménez videos on the rudiments of preaching provide visual metaphors from aviation that were particularly useful for Hilario to grasp the purpose of the introduction and the conclusion. The sermon introduction is the *despegue*, or takeoff. The metaphor describes succinctly and dramatically the purpose of a good sermon introduction. The airplane heads down the runway, gathering momentum, until the point of takeoff, a decisive move at just the right moment. The sermon introduction needs to be clear, concise and set the tone so the passengers can settle in and enjoy the rest of the flight. The introduction previews what is to come and encourages the listener to stay tuned to what follows.

A good *aterrizaje*, or landing, also requires timing. The conclusion reinforces the message, without introducing new material, and in some way, invokes a response. It

²⁰ Jiménez, *Principios de la Predicación*, 72. “Hay cuatro áreas básicas en la proclamación cristiana.... Evangelización, educación cristiana, cuidado pastoral y desafío profético.”

could be a change in attitude, perspective, or some sort of action that needs to occur. But the conclusion is when you end the sermon, and part of the challenge is to know how and when to do it. The successful takeoff and landing of an airplane can mean the difference between life and death of the passengers, and it can mean the difference between life and death for the sermon.

Sandwiched between the *despegue* and the *aterrizaje*, of course, is the *vuelo*, the flight itself. I tried to keep this as simple as possible, as “this is where you explain the Bible passage, tell stories, or whatever else you think God wants you to say. The people need to see why the message is important to them, so you need to show them.” The “what you think God wants you to say” is addressed in the sermon content section.

2. Sermon Content

Discussion regarding content, framed as “having something to say,” focused on identifying the biblical text and applying basic techniques of exegesis. Based upon his limited ability to even locate a specific passage in the Bible, his research (with his daughter’s assistance) was limited to a concordance, while I consulted commentaries. We discussed different approaches that preachers take to decide on the Scripture lesson for a sermon, such as the Revised Common and Narrative Lectionaries, mostly so he would be familiar with them.²¹ However, based upon the difficulties he encounters in navigating the Bible, I do not envision him using those methods any time soon. For the near term, he

²¹ According to Hilario, the lectionary reminds him of the “Daily Texts” published by the Moravian Church.

probably will preach topical sermons based upon the list of Bible verses that I had prepared for him after the first day.

Other topics emphasized in the content category, aside from the necessity of a *biblical* message, include the need for the message to be presented in a positive rather than negative “voice” (e.g. not “you are condemned to hell if you do not repent”), and that the message should always contain *good news* and *hope*. There is a lot more to cover, of course, but I feared that more would be too much at this point.

3. Sermon Delivery

Hilario would soon be charged with the task of preparing and delivering a sermon. We once again discussed some basic principles, such as the need to set aside personal agendas and avoid any sort of axe-grinding. This requires prayer and reflection, and not the night before the worship service. We reviewed once more a summary of what had been discussed, this being the only printed handout of the homiletics workshops:

Putting Your Sermon Together

- Ask God about what it is that he wants you to preach. Spend time in prayer and devotional Bible reading (or listening). Think about it as you go about your work each day. Trust God to show you the way.
- Choose the biblical text; read or listen to it many times.
- Remember the message should be *positive*, not negative. “Jesus is the way to eternal life,” is a positive message. “You are condemned to hell if you do not repent” is a negative message.
- Encourage and exhort, but do not demand.
- Share the Good News, make sure there is hope in your message.

- Your message should agree with the chosen text. You can explain what it means, why it is important, or whatever else you think God wants you to say.
- Include stories, illustrations, or examples that help people “see” what you mean.
- The introduction or “takeoff” should grab the listener’s attention.
- The conclusion or “landing” should encourage people to act.
- End with prayer and ask for the Holy Spirit’s help to do God’s will.

After reviewing the list, we discussed Hilario’s task of preaching two sermons in the next session. I asked him what he thought his people most needed to hear, assuming that he would be preaching a topical sermon. “That God loves them” was his immediate response. This is where the handout I had prepared of key scripture passages, organized by topic, became most useful to him.²² From it, he chose John 3:16-17, and retired to the guesthouse to prepare for the big event of the next day—preaching a biblical sermon.

Before introducing his first sermon, however, I think it appropriate to take a minor detour from the homiletics workshops to recount some events that had occurred in the weeks and months immediately preceding, as they will provide context for understanding Hilario’s message. The detour will loop back around to the final session of the workshops, and the events described will also illustrate just how many obstacles have been placed in our path along this journey, as well as how those same obstacles, in the end, served as impetus to bring the project to its conclusion.

²² This was not the purpose of the list; rather the original intention was for him to have a list of verses to memorize. However, Hilario appeared to be relieved to have a list (14 pages) of key Bible verses; it was more manageable for him. I had printed it in very large type to ensure that he could read it.

Encountering Roadblocks Along the Way

From Arbolitos on the Sarapiquí River where I live, to San Juan de Nicaragua on the Caribbean where Hilario lives, it would probably take an hour by car, if we had decent roads. However, the roads on the Costa Rica side of the San Juan are primitive, and roads do not even exist on the Nicaraguan side, so the rivers are our only roads. By river, then, it is about a four-hour journey each way. Every trip involves obtaining a tourist visa and having my belongings searched at least three army checkpoints along the San Juan River. I have had my wallet searched, my money counted, and I have had to explain to the soldier in charge where I planned to spend that money. It is arduous, time-consuming, expensive, and occasionally, a little dangerous. Months may transpire between trips, which has made continuity in our work together an elusive goal.

As of early November 2016, Hilario and I still had not completed the homiletics workshops. During the months leading to the Nicaraguan presidential elections, border security had tightened beyond the usual; Nicaragua was now requiring visitors doing non-profit or missions work to obtain permission from the Nicaraguan embassy before traveling. There were news reports of teams from Costa Rica having been denied entry for “national security” reasons. Since Daniel Ortega was the only candidate on the ballot for president, one would think that these extra measures would be unnecessary. However, the *Gran Canal* project still looms, and clashes between the army and landowners continue. I was hesitant to make a trip in this environment; I was not even certain that they would let me enter the country, but I really needed to go, for multiple reasons,

including the church construction project, but mostly to bring this thesis project to a satisfactory conclusion.

Then, in mid-November, a tropical storm hovered over the Caribbean, gathering steam. In Costa Rica, the government was on high alert, preparing for a natural disaster that everyone hoped would prove to be a false alarm. Hurricanes form at sea all of the time; none of them had moved inward toward Central America in over a century. Just in case, however, vulnerable areas were evacuated and emergency shelters opened; police, medical and rescue personnel all were on standby. Finally, the storm turned landward, and Otto, now a Category 2 hurricane, headed directly toward San Juan de Nicaragua. On November 24, the eye of the storm passed over the village. There was no disaster plan, so people were left stranded without an escape route. The village, as well as the rainforest further inland, was hit hard. Wind toppled perhaps a thousand or more trees, killing much wildlife. A poisonous vine contaminated the river, killing the fish and shrimp. Gardens were wiped out. Many homes were destroyed completely; others lost their roofs. Complicating matters even further, in the midst of the hurricane, there was an earthquake.

The Indian River was already swollen from the days of heavy rains preceding Otto. Then the earthquake struck, and the *Laguna Papagayo*, into which raw sewage is routinely dumped, flooded, spilling its filth into the village. The rains, which continued for several days more, were unwelcomed intruders into the homes, but the rains also provided the only water suitable for human consumption. The situation was dire and yet, when two boats from Costa Rica attempted to deliver emergency supplies, they were turned away at the border.

SIGA wanted to assist in the emergency, but there is no mechanism for sending money or supplies, except to take them there. However, I was more hesitant than ever to attempt a trip. In light of such circumstances, were homiletics really that important? Once telephone service had been restored, Hilario and I discussed the situation. I suggested that the community agree upon a plan of action beyond simply looking for donations, and we would see what we could do to help. Meanwhile, we concluded that he would need to travel to Arbolitos.²³

The impetus for Hilario's trip to Costa Rica was to facilitate our helping with recovery efforts after Otto, but this would also grant us the opportunity to continue with the homiletics workshops. We now had four days to work on an emergency response plan,²⁴ discuss college scholarships (we have awarded eight for the coming year), review the progress of the church building construction, and we would be able to do the homiletics workshops, without the constant distractions and interruptions we face in San Juan. Homiletics is that important.

Session Five (Day 3)

We met at the library; Hilario says he is ready to preach. He announces the title of his sermon as "*Promesa que encuentra en la Biblia*," based on Ephesians 2:8-9. He

²³ Normally, it is considerably more complicated for Hilario to travel to Costa Rica than it is for me to travel to Nicaragua; Costa Rica is restrictive about Nicaraguans entering the country. In this emergency situation, there was little choice left but for him to "informally" enter the country.

²⁴ Since I had requested a plan, the Rama community leaders determined that the best response to help them long term would be to provide seed with which to replant their gardens. Therefore, SIGA provided 100 pounds each of seed for corn, beans, and rice.

began by explaining the “order of worship” and leading the congregation—consisting of me and his daughter Doris—in prayer. We will pray the “Our Father,” he says, but we pray in Spanish. Similarly, he announces Ephesians but reads from *Efesios*. It quickly became apparent that this would not simply be a classroom exercise. He would lead us in worship! The entire text of his “first sermon ever preached” is as follows:

I am ready to open the program for the service; before anything else, we start to go in prayer first. After we done praying, then we start our chapter to read. After we are done read our chapter, then we start to express what we read about. About God’s word, and this is a promise what the Almighty give us to do and this is a proclaim what we have to do, our people in Rio Indio and in San Juan de Nicaragua.

So I appreciate and thank the Almighty, who give me this opportunity and this faith and this love that I could make this program to keep on to serve the Almighty. So I say thanks, and we will start to get prayer. Let’s pray, we will pray “Our Father” [in Spanish, short version]. Amen.

Well, we open the text, what we’ll start to read. We’ll start to read, like Ephesians, *Efesios*, we will start to read *Efesios* 2, verse 8 and 9. This is a promise, *promesa de fe, que encuentra en la Biblia*. The Word of Jesus Christ said, ‘*porque por gracia sois salvo por medio de la fe y eso no de nosotros, pues es don de Dios. No por obra, para que nadie se gloriase.*’ Amen.

Well, this is what we, the promise what we have and the love what God have for us, and we must have love for He like how he have love for us. Cause this is a big promise what he give us and this is a love what him have for us, for give we this thanks, for live in this thanks, and give we this faith. We beg for faith to He the Almighty because only Him is what could salvate all of us in the earth. Because we don’t have a next person, or a next leaders beside him, saving Jesus Christ. So we thank him for all, what he do for us, we thank him for give we the strength, we thank him for help us.

And well, the Word she say that we live with thanks from he. And faith by him, when we ask for it. But if we don’t ask for it, we don’t have faith. So the Almighty is for everything for us, also the *don* what he talk about, that is a big for give what he give, a blessing for us, if we look for it. But if we don’t look for it, we never could get it. Because he is the onliest one to do with that *don*, that blessing.

But we all the time have to walk in his steps, if we did get out of him step, I don’t think we could live if we do. So this is a lovely text what we choose and chose for

today, and thank God for it. Thank he for giving he the faith and the love we do ____ [drowned out by a motorcycle passing by]. So we have our next text what go in Hechos 4:12. We would like to read the next text a little bit, dice *'en ningún otro hay salvación porque no hay otros nombres bajo el cielo donde los hombres en que podemos ser salvos.'*

So he talking about help us, eh? He talking about salvation. He give we a way, a way we have to look for to get salvation. The salvation come, his love what he have for us. And the salvation come if we love he. If we follow he, the onliest one, Jesus Christ. Because if we don't follow Jesus we never could get I think, to the salvation, because he said, if you know me, I know you, but if you don't know me, how I can do to know you.

You see, so, them is things what we have to proclaim to our people, to get them in unity, to follow the Almighty. Because without Jesus Christ we isn't. Without Jesus Christ we no have strength. Without Jesus Christ we can't do nothing. We no have faith, we no have love, because he is the onliest love for everybody into the whole world.

He talk about, the next thing, he talk about 'nobody else under the sky [points upward] or on the earth what could give, what could name him to salvate the humans on the earth.' The onliest one who can salvate is Jesus Christ. So that is our faith and love in Jesus Christ because he the onliest one that could salvate us from our sin, from our torment, from our enemy.

So we thank he a lot for all this text what he give us, we thank him for give we the day, we thank him for give we this love and this help and this *ánimo* to do this, and to follow he and to do his work. So we have that love and we have that love for us, so we thank him a lot for all that he do for us.

Now, we have to talk about what is the more important for us in this text. If we don't follow the Almighty I no think we could reach to where we want to reach.

The next thing is, God so loved all of us, with all his love, all his mind, everything he love us, so we have to try our best, to see what we could do the right of it, to follow him, because he's the onliest begotten father what we have what could lead us the right way and give us what we ask for, because without his name and without his love if we no have for him, we can't reach to where we want to reach. So we thank him for that, we thank him for everything what he do for us.

We thank all of the process what he have for us. We thank him for all the *salud* what he give we. The talent what he give us to try and to walk the right the way, to make this proclaim for our country, for our people, for our community, no? So we thank and love him for everything.

Now the next thing we want to do is, say, if we have any explanation, if you want to ask a question, or what we talk about, that will be very good. What do you think about it, what we read, what we talk about?

[Since we were only a congregation of two, I asked a few questions]

Me: How does God want us to be better?

Hilario: God wants us to be better, to walk in his road, in his step, God wants us to be in unity, God wants us to be lovely in all of us. God would like to see all of us be together, and walk in his road.

Me: Where do we start?

Hilario: We have to start proclaim, get out the *evangelio* to our people, try the best to speak to them, convince them, make them reach to hear the gospel of God and I think so then we get those to understand what we talking about. About what God left for us on this earth.

If you don't have, we'll talk about something else. We'll talk about what I did want to, to said, in this, I did have a dream before all this thing come to pass, what you see, the destruction, eh? So I did have a dream, God come to me and said, 'look the right road, look the way, fight for open your way, because a lots of sufferment will be for us.'

So in my dream, what I see, what he put before me, I see San Juan de Nicaragua was burning, was in fire. And I see everybody running, just don't know where to go. And in my dream, I see, what I look, it just my wife, my father-in-law, my children with me, we looking the balance of family them, and we can't find them.

And the fire start gone through the whole town of San Juan, and when I came back after I run off in a piece of they land, when I came back I only find like three, we call it, three roots, three *troncos*, what just smokin'. One on the sunset, one on the east, and one on the north. So I get up the morning, and I tell my wife, I say 'you know what, Mami, I think we will get a heavy sufferment. We must very care, we must pray to the Almighty, because he is the onliest one what could do better for everybody. Because I see in my dream a lots of sufferment.'

And this come in, I said, through we day's hard, nobody want to hear the Gospel. Everybody just be in fiestas, everybody just be around, maybe, drinking and you don't know what them been doing. So I think this will be a hard sufferment for us, so you know, we must all the time keep in our church, work for our church, pray, talk to the family them, and I told many of my family them, I say, 'must care, because we will see a big sufferment.'

Before this happen [Hurricane Otto and the earthquake], like six days before this happen, I lose of my cousin in Rama Cay. God take him home because, well, we don't know why. Maybe it's because he disobedient, he don't want to serve the Almighty, and well, the Almighty say, 'ok, this enough. I put you on test. I try you, you don't want to be with me, you disobey, okay.' So, I think that was the end of she.

So, all them thing we gone through before that, I see, I was working what in some woods, and before the death come, I see some, like, you looking on a *tele*, I see a heart, a big heart like this [drawing a large heart in the air with his hands] come to me, and the heart and I see a lots of blood. In the middle of the blood I see like a piece of silver, just working so, down so [gestures a drilling motion with the hands]. And after that, the heart part in two and it come black, black, black, like a _____ [unintelligible], so I know that was a death. Because every death, what we have to leave from our family I see like that. So everything in the Almighty hand, God know what he do, because he is the onliest Maker what have the power, and the Almighty to do, to take, to say when. He the onliest one. So we leave it in the Almighty hand, because nobody else besides him.

So we thank him for everything what happen, what take place, all what the destruction, he know why he do. Because there's lots of sufferment, a lot of problem, what we go through, and many we can't resolve so he take the last decision. We thank him for that, we thank him for the rain, we thank him for the sun, we thank him for everything.

This was my speech for 30 minutes and any program else we have, we're welcome to do it, and well I so appreciate and happy to do this, because this is my first try what I make to go through direct to work for God. And I appreciate and thank sister Ruth that he help me, she help me a lot. She is my *asesor*, she is what show me the way, she's what give me the faith how to do it, and together with the Almighty, so I thank you and appreciate you for everything sister Ruth, thank you. God bless you, and God will provide and for give you and give more to a blessing. Thank you.

Me: You're welcome.

So well, I think now we will shut up with a prayer, we closing with a prayer. I think we could close with the Psalm 23, so let's say pray, to close our program. And thank God for it. [Psalm 23 recited in Spanish]. Amen, halleluiah, gracias.

More than two years of hit-or-miss and off-and-on workshops had culminated in this preaching event. Hilario had switched from John 3:16, but still preached "love."

Technical "errors" are obvious (attributing *Ephesians* to Jesus, for example); I will

comment on a few others, but mostly look beyond them to what is good, how far he has come, and reflect generally upon where we need to go from here, although exploration of possible “next steps” will wait until the final chapter.

Hilario’s love, compassion, and concern for his people are obvious, and his message was authentic and from the heart. He was not preaching to Doris or to me; he was preaching to his people in the midst of their misery. He had preached two sermons, really. He had “landed the plane” and was approaching the gate, but unexpectedly he takes off again, with fantastic stories of dreams and visions! Perhaps he had forgotten to include them earlier; preaching extemporaneously without an outline, as he does, makes it easy enough to forget something. It also could be that it did not occur to him to share the dream stories until that very moment. Or, it could be the first-time preacher syndrome of needing to pack everything into the one sermon.

Whatever the case, the context from which this “dream sermon” emerged is clear; it had been less than two weeks since Hurricane Otto and the earthquake. Clearly, although he was looking at me and this was a classroom exercise, he was speaking to the fears of his people. As fantastic as his visions may sound, his “dream sermon” would have resonated. I take them at face value, even though I know that they sound farfetched as to whether—or how—he really saw them. That is because I know him; otherwise I would have my doubts, but that is me, filtering what I hear through my own experiences. Besides, just as with *Jonah*, whether the stories are literally or allegorically true is not the point. God had communicated with Hilario via allegorical dreams and visions, that he literally saw; visions that expressed the experiences and needs of his people. The sermon acknowledges suffering, reminds the people that God sees their suffering, and then the

sermon calls the people to act. The “dream sermon” was a second sermon, but a powerful one.

After worship, I asked Hilario if he felt nervous, and he said that he did not. In the beginning, he was hesitant, awkwardly fumbling with the papers, trying to locate the Scripture passage, but once he had found his place, he was calm, collected, and confident throughout. This was truly a spiritual event, and I did not want to ruin the mood with even slight criticisms of his sermon that might shake his confidence. He had poured his heart into it, he did the best he could, and the results were better than I had hoped. It has taken persistence—for him and for me—to get to this point, and it was a beautiful moment. There will other opportunities in the future, I hope, where we can work on landing that plane.

Therefore, as feedback I limited my suggestions to practical matters, such as marking his place with a paperclip or bookmark so he doesn’t have to shuffle and hesitate at the beginning. I also suggested that, when he builds a lectern, he should make sure that it is high enough for his height, and wide enough to accommodate a Bible and a manuscript. I also suggested that, since he is soft spoken and will likely be preaching without a microphone, he needs to make certain the entire congregation can hear him. For example, he could stand in the middle instead of in front of the congregation, or seating could be arranged in a semi-circle, he could ask everyone to move closer to him, or turn up the volume of his voice.

Hilario may have “broken all of the rules” in this sermon, but he feels good about it and so do I. He had something to say, what he felt God wanted him to say, and he said it. Having successfully answered that challenge, he would be returning home, instilled

with greater confidence for the task that lies ahead. I almost fell out of my chair, though, when he announced that “we will shut up with a prayer,” recalling the many times I have sat in the pew hoping that the preacher would do just that!

Session Six (Day 4)

On our fourth and final day, Hilario preached on the text that he had originally planned to use in his first sermon, John 3:16-17. It was a sound message, but the content was mostly a repetition of the day before, that is, of the “first” sermon, minus the apocalyptic visions. On this occasion, however, he chose to preach bilingually. There were several things he did well in this attempt. He alternated between English and Spanish, without exactly repeating what he said in either language. Considering that there may be individuals in the congregation that speak both languages, they will not become bored with *verbatim* translations, but rather will find something different in each that reinforce a common theme. I complimented him on his ability to navigate both languages in this way, and I also noted that he had adjusted the length of his message to accommodate the additional time required to preach in two languages.

There is a good probability that, in San Juan de Nicaragua, where the Rama are a minority, he will have opportunities to preach bilingually, so these were the positive elements I focused upon. First, just because he can speak Spanish, that does not mean that in joint worship services (if there ever are such services) he should speak only Spanish. If the indigenous and “Spanish” congregations come together on occasion, it will be important that the Rama still hear “their” language, and not just the language of the

Spanish colonizer. In any event, when required to preach bilingually, he can do it, and for the sake of the unity of the Body of Christ, and the wellbeing of the community, I hope this forebodes of future times of worshipping together as one Body.

It takes a strong sense of calling and true grit for a man of advanced age and limited academic abilities to start a new career as pastor and preacher, and it takes humility and insight for him to realize that the calling to do so is also a calling to prepare. Hilario has made a good start; he still has a long way to go. My job is to mentor him, find ways to help him learn, and encourage him. How far his hermeneutical and homiletical abilities can develop remains to be seen. Does he really need to follow all of the rules and master the “art” of preaching? Probably not. Most importantly, from my point of view, is content, the “having something to say,” and then saying it clearly and effectively. Both take time and practice to master, so going forward, we will work toward finding new ways to develop his hermeneutical skills and apply those skills in the pulpit.

V. OUTCOMES

As Hilario and I considered where we ought to focus our priorities, we both agreed that he needed to become more acquainted with the Bible. A man of God, spiritually mature, and prophetically gifted, he could not differentiate 1 Chronicles from 1 Corinthians. This is a literacy issue; navigating the Bible, even though it includes a table of contents with page number references, is difficult for someone not used to books. What is a “table of contents” after all? This is not unique to Hilario; I found that, in teaching hermeneutics workshops with Latino pastors in Costa Rica, some of them did not know how to use the concordance that was in the back of their Bible; they did not know what a concordance was! Therefore, what they know, what they preach even, often comes to them second-handedly; frequently by way of a radio or television preacher.

From the outset, I sought ways for Hilario to become more acquainted with the Bible. I provided him a solar-powered audio New Testament (in English), and this remains, I believe, his primary access to Scriptures. Unfortunately, it is only the New Testament. I purchased a series of DVDs and textbooks (in Spanish) which provides a “panoramic” survey of the entire Bible. However, even though Hilario can read Spanish, albeit with difficulty, it was too difficult for him to manage—jumping from Bible to textbook to DVD was too much to expect. Furthermore, the materials present most topics in the abstract, only occasionally delving into concrete examples, so he was doubly lost. These resources, both texts and DVDs still could prove useful in the future, just not as stand-alone materials. A facilitator is needed to guide the process, provide concrete

examples of abstract concepts, and foster discussion and critical thinking. The facilitator needs to ensure the success of the learner, and not set him or her up for failure.

Some of our challenges have been dictated by geography. Although Hilario and I live in two different countries, both of us are closer to one another geographically than we are to other parts of our respective countries. Nonetheless, one difficulty is transportation and another is crossing international boundaries. This could be partly overcome via other means of communication, but we also both lack telephone service and Internet. These were known factors when we began, so from the beginning my concerns focused on finding ways for him to study independently in my absence. However, as I just mentioned, when the “live” instructor is missing, no significant progress is made, despite Hilario’s best efforts.

To Hilario’s credit, he has taken to heart the idea that learning is a lifelong process, and as a man in his sixties, he has demonstrated considerable courage by placing himself in an academic setting as student. Therefore, we will move forward. We will continue to work on hermeneutics and homiletics, building on what we have learned thus far. We will continue to seek ways to overcome the distance and literacy barriers. The most immediate need is for Hilario to have something to say and find a way to say it on a weekly basis, as he leads worship at the Indian River Indigenous Church.

I cannot always travel to San Juan de Nicaragua, and for Hilario to travel to Arbolitos is even more difficult, so finding ways for him to progress independently continues to be top priority. To that end, our next “experiment” will be to provide integrated hermeneutics and homiletics training in video format. I store the lessons on a flash drive, and then he can play them on a computer in San Juan de Nicaragua. I tested

the idea during his recent visit to Arbolitos, and he seemed to be pleased with the approach. Taking a passage from *Galatians*, I:

1. Ask him to locate the specific Scripture passage in his own Bible (I would tell him whether it was in the New or Old Testament, suggest generally where in each, or possibly provide him with a study Bible which I also possess, so that I can specify page numbers).
2. Read the Scripture in English and in Spanish, and ask him to follow along in the Spanish version.
3. Provide basic background information on the book, pericope, cultural-political-social situation, conflicts, etc., as appropriate.
4. Preach a sermon (or insert a pre-recorded sermon from another preacher) on the passage.
5. Ask questions to encourage reflection and contextualization for the Rama:
 - a. Do you understand the message?
 - b. Do you *agree* with the preacher's interpretation of Scripture?
 - c. Do you think the stories (illustrations) help explain the message?
 - d. Can you think of other stories that your congregation might understand better?

Initially, we will start with my own sermons and sermons downloaded from the website "A Sermon for Every Sunday," which follow the Revised Common Lectionary. I do not envision Hilario ever being a lectionary preacher, but I am hoping that this will at least be helpful to him for preaching the main events of the Christian calendar, and make it easier for me to pinpoint sermons related to specific Scripture passages. In addition to

experiencing how others interpret Scripture, he will also be exposed to diverse styles of preaching. We will begin with Scripture related to key events of the church calendar—Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, the Ascension, Day of Pentecost, etc. The Moravian Church is a traditional, liturgical church, so this would be consistent with that heritage. Then, after the first half-dozen of these lessons, we will evaluate the effectiveness of this approach and go from there.

The principal misgiving I have with this approach is Item No. 3, “provide basic background information ... as appropriate.” Obviously, I will function as the filter that determines what is or is not appropriate or relevant. I do not wish to be judged with a greater strictness than I can withstand (Jas 3:2), nor do I wish to be cast into the sea with a millstone tied around my neck for having led someone astray. At least for now, though, I see no other option.

If this idea is successful, I may broaden this approach by enlisting other preachers to participate, even if I remain responsible for the hermeneutical commentary. It would be interesting to try this in Spanish as well, but as Hilario will preach in English and “A Sermon for Every Sunday” is a one-stop shop for lectionary-based sermons, perhaps we can cover more territory in a shorter period of time than we would if I were to do all of the preaching or have to solicit volunteers.

Reflecting on my work with Hilario, I had no idea just how much literacy actually creates a barrier to the learning process for non-literates, and the alphabet is not the only problem. In the future, I will try to be more cognizant of oral learning styles. I will *try* to work deductively. For instance, when teaching about the Synoptic Problem, instead of explaining the theories and concepts and then providing examples, we would start with

concrete examples, such as comparing the Sermon on the Plain to the Sermon on the Mount. Only then would we move to theoretical discussions on why the “problem” exists.

My experience working with Hilario and others shows that “live” instructors cannot be entirely replaced by technology. We need scholars, but at the same time, it is reassuring that not everything depends upon the people with credentials. The Holy Spirit is primordial; when someone like Hilario, who has so many obstacles to overcome, can rise to the pulpit and preach a word of hope and healing to his people, I cannot take any credit for that. What we are seeing is the Holy Spirit at work. In his weakness, the Holy Spirit makes him strong.

This brings me to the subject of the ‘empty’ preaching, even false teachings, of many others, who are on the same level academically as Hilario. Even though I have seen many a pastor unable to stand and read Scripture to the congregation, many of them will not seek help, perhaps for reasons of pride and having their weaknesses exposed. They compensate for the lack of anything substantive to say with fiery antics that are devoid of divine inspiration. I believe what sets Hilario apart is the reverence he has for the Word of God and a recognition that being called to pastor a congregation is a sacred duty. Those, really, should be the attitudes of any pastor, regardless of credentials and diplomas.

Contextualizing Theological Education

I do not like to call myself “missionary.” Part of this is due to a sense of embarrassment from things I have witnessed personally, and now I am even less enamored with the term due to the shame I feel for the sins committed among the

indigenous in Christ's name. Even more importantly, though, is my conviction that divisions between "home" and "foreign" or "missionary" and "pastor" are artificial divides that have evolved into hierarchical definitions which perpetuate an us-and-them mentality that should not exist within the body of Christ. We are all in this together, and belonging to Christ's body is meant to be mutually edifying; it symbolizes a give-and-receive relationship among equals.

A "catholic" church embraces diversity within the body, and no one member has authority to demand conformity of the other. The church proclaims the Truth that sets Creation free. Truth might insist that all parts of the body repent from practices He abhors, even those which we believe to be consistent with the Gospel, and Truth can affirm practices which we consider to be idolatrous or pagan.

When the church finally becomes "a living demonstration of the freedom and dignity of the new man [sic], and of the new possibilities in Jesus Christ for a world dominated and oppressed by demonic powers and principalities, full of hate and injustice,"¹ she will function as a beacon of hope in the world, instead of as a reminder of a painful past. The structures that separate us from one another, at least among believers, will no longer exist, and we will truly be one as Jesus is one with his Father. Without diminishing the importance of orthodoxy (except to ask, "who gets to define it?"), we need to emphasize at least equally orthopraxy, for "the gospel is praxis. It requires not only intellectual commitment to its claims and demands but also practical and existential fulfillment of these demands."²

¹ Orlando E. Costas, *The Church and Its Mission: A Shattering Critique from the Third World* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1976), 55.

² Costas, 83.

The church is spiritual and organic, but her presence in the world is physical, and she preaches to physical and spiritual beings in contextually diverse, concrete situations. The church is called to advocate for liberty and justice for all in the public and private, religious and secular spheres. She empowers and equips brothers and sisters around the world to preach freedom to the captives and sight to the blind in their part of the world. She sends missionaries (when absolutely necessary) and she supports native ministries. She funds seminaries and colleges that provide theological education, so that those whom she sends into the world are prepared for the ministry to which they have been called.

The role of theological education is to train Christian servants “for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph 4:12-13). Therefore, as institutions of theological education are of and for the church catholic, they also need to work at dismantling hierarchical structures that keep us divided into spiritually-damaging “us” and “them” camps so that all can participate. It is time to abandon our inherited hierarchical/paternalistic/colonial mindset and truly regard one another as equals; it is time to fully acknowledge that “we” need them every much as “they” need us.

Within the context of my immediate world—rural Central America—the need for a contextualized approach to theological education includes making it accessible to those who have had little or no academic preparation. If the North American church presumes that her pastors should have at least a Master of Divinity degree, as many denominations do, then the same ought to be true for congregations abroad. It is not enough to give communities like the Rama, or my neighbors in Costa Rica, our leftovers, our amateurs,

or our misfits. They deserve the best that the church has to offer, and that includes access to quality theological education. However, seminary would be an impossible dream for a mature individual who has no hope of ever graduating from elementary school. To tell Hilario, for example, that he should go back to school and finish elementary, high school, and then college before he even attempts to prepare for the ministry is not realistic. Nonetheless, he has been called by God, and that call to serve is also a call to prepare, just as it is for every other person God may call to ministry. Those saints who, due to circumstances beyond their control have few options in preparing for ministry, also deserve quality, theologically-sound preparation. They need it; even more, their *congregations* need it.

Vision for the Sarapiquí Institute for Ministerial Excellence

For the pastors with whom I work in Costa Rica, the city of San José—where theological seminaries, Christian colleges and Bible institutes abound—might as well be on another continent. A significant percentage of them are Nicaraguan immigrants who lack even a rudimentary level of education, so accessing a traditional theological education is impossible; if not for the educational prerequisites then for a lack of money. Nonetheless, these servants minister in their communities better than any “foreign” missionary will ever be able to, and they are hungry to learn, especially regarding the Bible. The Bible simply is not as easy to read and understand as we like to pretend it is.

It became obvious to me on my first trip to Central America, even before realizing that God was calling me there, that there is a need for theological education to be made accessible to ministers with limited academic experience. In a three-week span of time, I

visited over fifteen churches, where I taught stewardship seminars. Typically, there was a time of food and fellowship, and pastors, one after another, consistently told me of their desire to become better equipped for ministry.

After that first visit, I reflected upon why God had blessed me with so many opportunities and yet my brothers and sisters went without. I asked God, “why have you given me so much, when they have so little?” It was as a result of that question, I believe, that soon after responding to the call, God gave me a vision to establish the *Sarapiquí Institute for Ministerial Excellence*. That was twelve years ago, when God gave us this “unfunded mandate.” We have taken a few steps toward its realization, and each step has been an opportunity to learn. Occasionally, I am tempted to put the dream aside; I cannot do it alone, and at times I suffer from compassion fatigue. But then God reminds me that it is his vision and not mine. One such reminder has been my work with Hilario.

The vision for the Institute is to offer a well-rounded suite of ministerial leadership development programs, comparable in breadth and scope to those found at traditional theological seminaries, while taking into consideration the educational levels, cultural context, and doctrinal diversity of program participants. I do not wish to simply hang up a sign that says “Bible institute”—those are a dime a dozen. Instead, I wish to partner with one or more reputable educational institutions—ideally ecumenically and internationally—that would ensure academic integrity by helping to design the programs, providing instructors and field experts, perhaps even opportunities for seminarians to earn course credit.

For some learners, it could open the way for more advanced studies. In any event, if an individual is going to sacrifice time and money to study, then it should count for

something beyond a certificate of attendance with my signature on it. As one pastor told me, “if I had credit for every seminar or course that I have ever taken, I would have a Ph.D. by now.” Whether or not I am around to see the dream realized remains to be seen; time marches on. But the Lord’s timing is the only perfect timing, so I will stubbornly hold on to the dream conceptually, and let God in his own way put the pieces together.

The Truth Can Set Us All Free

Repercussions from having been “discovered” by colonizing forces centuries ago are still being felt by the Rama Nation today. Settlers still encroach on their lands and stake claims to what does not belong to them, and the government blatantly disregards its “treaty” commitments. The Rama live in extreme poverty, a “fourth world” people in a third-world economy. The *Gran Canal* project is imminent, and they are powerless to stop it, even though they have the law on their side. The government, it seems, is determined to rid the country of its “Indian problem” by pretending that the Indian does not exist. From the perspective of outsiders—from the government and the *mestizo* farmer, to mining corporations and land developers—the original occupants have stood in the way of progress and profit for too long.

When I first began investigating North American indigenous history—primarily to fill in the blanks on the Rama narrative—I expected to encounter numerous commonalities, since the conquest of the Rama is part of the same colonial history, beginning with Columbus’ discovery of the Americas. Of course, I knew that European explorers had arrived to a New World that was already home to other people. I knew that, historically, the Christian missionary enterprise among the indigenous was less than

stellar, but I had accepted the “they meant well” excuse—they were products of their times. After all, we cannot hold them to our higher standards, and we have learned from their mistakes.

Even with a general knowledge of past events, I was horrified by what I learned, all of which had been hidden in plain sight. It was unnerving to realize just how prominent a role the church had played in the conquest of the indigenous First Nations, primarily because I had never heard the details reported from an indigenous perspective. Even today, when news is reported that involves Native Americans, whether it be the *Gran Canal* or the Lakota Sioux opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline, the indigenous perspective is underreported. Instead, the potential negative impact on the environment is emphasized, not the violation of indigenous rights.

As I have listened to the stories of “treaty” violations by the Nicaraguan government against my friends and neighbors, and also watched incursions into Costa Rica by the Sandinista army not far from where I live, I was not surprised: what more could be expected from a communist dictator? There is a shared history throughout the Americas, but in a democratic republic such as the United States of America, where liberty and justice is for all, I was convinced that we had progressed beyond that. Perhaps we have; to a point. However, when I listen to Native cries for justice today, it is obvious that, for many, the wounds have never healed. For the most part, the Indian remains invisible to American society, and their cries fall on deaf ears.

Part of the problem, I believe, is that we have been lied to, by our government and by our public education system, which is a product of that government. We also have been lied to by our churches, a sin of both omission and commission. This last point is

the most troubling of all. We have failed, as the body of Christ, to confess and repent of our complicity in the suffering of native peoples, and our sin has created an obstacle to healing and redemption, for us as well as for the Native American. It is time for the body of Christ to be truthful, so that others might see the Truth that is Jesus.

Telling the Truth (even when it hurts)

Jaws will drop whenever I share stories from the jungle. I tell people about the *Gran Canal*, about murderous raids on coastal villages, and the typical response is outrage. However, whenever I mention the suffering of Native Americans closer to home and the abuses of the U.S. government against them, or the role that the church actively played in that abuse, suggesting that we still have work to do to heal the wounds both of the past and present, these ideas generally are brushed aside. “We all know that history.” “There’s no point in dwelling on the past.” “I can’t be held accountable for sins I did not commit.” “There is nothing we can do about it now.” These are the kinder alternatives to “they should leave the reservation and get a job.” I am accused of promoting a “revisionist history” of what really happened.

I agree that revisionist history, which seems to be a popular trend, can be troubling. For instance, I lived for many years in Virginia, the “birthplace of presidents.” Virginia natives George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison all played vital roles in the early years of the United States. Nonetheless, students at the University of Virginia, also known as “Mr. Jefferson’s University,” have petitioned current president Teresa Sullivan to refrain from quoting Jefferson in speeches, because as did his

contemporaries, he owned slaves.³ Slavery is an egregious sin, and that history must be wrestled with, but it cannot be done by obliterating the evidence from our collective memory. *That* would be revising history, a dishonest “retelling” of it. If we start down that slippery slope, where do we stop? Our national heroes are flawed, from the Founding Fathers to John F. Kennedy to Martin Luther King, Jr. Still, positive changes throughout the world have occurred because of them as well as Jefferson, the principal author of the Declaration of Independence. At the same time, to sweep the ugliness under the rug would be a lie, and that is just what we have done with regard to the discovery of the Americas.

I see no path to healing through re-writing history to suit contemporary sensibilities, but it would be a good first step if we were to *tell the truth* about our past. This would not be a *retelling* of history, but an honest telling of it. Is that not what George Washington taught us, when he told the truth about chopping down the cherry tree? So, an honest telling of history probably means that cowboys who “won the West” do not get to ride off into the sunset wearing a white Stetson. It also means that we remove the tarnished halo of recently-sainted Junípero Serra, and scores of others like him.

As Martin Luther King, Jr. reminds us, the United States was “born in genocide when it embraced the doctrine that the original American, the Indian, was an inferior race.”⁴ He could see how sin of the past, barely acknowledged and never repented from, had led to sin being perpetuated, noting that “even today we have not permitted ourselves

³Jack Heretik, “Faculty, Students, Ask University of Virginia President to Stop Quoting Thomas Jefferson,” *The Washington Free Beacon*, November 15, 2016, accessed January 5, 2017, <http://freebeacon.com/issues/faculty-students-ask-uva-president-stop-quoting-thomas-jefferson>.

⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr., excerpt from *Why We Can't Wait*, 1963, accessed February 10, 2016, Native News Online.Net, <http://nativenewsonline.net/opinion/dr-martin-luther-king-jr-nation-born-genocide>.

to reject or to feel remorse.” Clearly, racism preceded the arrival of the first African onto American soil. If we continue to minimize the sin of genocide against the indigenous, and glorify the heroes of our country without acknowledging how our national consciousness has been informed by racism from the very beginning, we will never be able to heal, not as a nation and not as a church.

As a product of the U.S. public school system, I and my classmates were lied to. That was not history we learned; propaganda designed to foster patriotism as we blindly pledged allegiance to the flag is what we were taught. Yes, history books mention Native American icons such as Crazy Horse, Geronimo, Sacagawea, Pocahontas, and Sitting Bull. However, mentioning them is not the same as hearing even a small part of their story. We ought to ask indigenous historians to write, or at least contribute to our children’s textbooks; then we might obtain a more accurate perspective of events. Instead, history is told almost exclusively from a Euro-American and European perspective.

I was indoctrinated to believe in “American exceptionalism.” The great American narrative begins with Christopher Columbus. Ignoring the fact that others, perhaps the Vikings, had arrived before him, or that he never actually set foot on the mainland, we recited the poem “1492”:

In fourteen hundred ninety-two,
Columbus sailed the ocean blue.
He had three ships and left from Spain;
He sailed through sunshine, wind and rain.
...
October 12 their dream came true,
You never saw a happier crew!
“Indians! Indians!” Columbus cried;

His heart was filled with joyful pride.⁵

In *Breakfast of Champions*, fiction writer Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. presents a far more accurate account of events:

Teachers of children in United States of America wrote this date on blackboards again and again, and asked the children to memorize it with pride and joy: 1492. The teachers told the children that this was when their continent was discovered by human beings. Actually, millions of human beings were already living full and imaginative lives on the continent in 1492. That was simply the year in which sea pirates began to cheat and rob and kill them.

....

The sea pirates were white. The people who were already on the continent when the pirates arrived were copper-colored. When slavery was introduced onto the continent, the slaves were black. Color was everything.

Here is how the Pirates were able to take whatever they wanted from anybody else... They were meaner than anyone else, and they had gunpowder... The chief weapon of the sea pirates, however, was their capacity to astonish. Nobody else could believe, until it was much too late, how heartless and greedy they were.⁶

There is something even more sinister behind the devastation caused by these “sea pirates,” and its origins lie in Christendom. In the bosom of the Christian church originated the notion that lands which were already inhabited by others could be rightfully claimed by foreign powers. Responsibility, then, for the devastation that this “Christian” doctrine has caused worldwide, lies at her feet.

A series of papal bulls, issued over the course of four centuries, evolved into what is now known as the Doctrine of Discovery. In 1095, Pope Urban II issued *Terra Nullius*, or “empty land.” Any land not already in the hands of “Christian” empires is without legitimate owner, and therefore can be confiscated.⁷ Centuries later, Pope Nicholas V

⁵ There are variations of this poem, with authorship attributed to numerous sources.

⁶ Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., *Breakfast of Champions*, (1973; repr. New York: Dial Press/Random House, 2011), 10-11.

⁷ “Lewis and Clark: The Unheard Voices,” *Curriculum Connections: A free online publication for K-12 educators provided by ADL’s A World of Difference Institute* (Anti-Defamation League: Fall 2004),

declared war “against all non-Christians throughout the world”; the pagans were “without rights to any land or nation. Christian leaders claimed a God-given right to take control of all lands and used this idea to justify war, colonization, and even slavery.”⁸ Then, in 1493—that date is no coincidence—Pope Alexander VI issued *Inter Caetera*, which granted to Spain the right to “discover” new land, even if already occupied:

In our times especially the Catholic faith and the Christian religion be exalted and be everywhere increased and spread, that ... barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith itself... In order that you may enter upon so great an undertaking with greater readiness and heartiness endowed with the benefit of our apostolic favor, we, ... out of the fullness of our apostolic power, by the authority of Almighty God conferred upon us in blessed Peter and of the vicarship of Jesus Christ ... make, appoint, and depute you and your said heirs and successors lords of them with full and free power, authority, and jurisdiction of every kind....⁹

If the indigenous of North America had wondered why Thomas Jefferson found it necessary to make a deal with France or the Louisiana territories, instead of with the rightful owners of the land, therein lies at least part of the answer. Legal title of land could not be held by “pagans.”

In 1823, the U.S. Supreme Court used the same pattern and paradigm of domination to claim in the ruling *Johnson & Graham's Lessee v. M'Intosh* that the United States as the successor to various ‘potentates’ had the ‘ultimate dominion’ or ‘ultimate title’ (right of territorial domination) over all lands within the claimed boundaries of the United States. The Court said that as a result of the documents mentioned above, authorizing ‘Christian people’ to ‘discover’ and possess the lands of ‘heathens,’ the Indians were left with a mere ‘right of occupancy;’ an occupancy that, according to the Court was subject to the ‘ultimate title’ or ‘absolute title’ of the United States. The Johnson case has been cited repeatedly by Australian, Canadian, New Zealand and United States courts, and the Doctrine of Discovery has been held by all these countries to have granted European settler societies plenary power (domination) over Indigenous Peoples, [and] legal title to their lands... Europeans believed this was proper based on their ethnocentric,

64, accessed January 31, 2017, <http://www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/curriculum-connections-fall-2004.pdf>.

⁸ “Lewis and Clark: The Unheard Voices.”

⁹ Pope Alexander VI, The Doctrine of Discovery, “The Legal Battle and Spiritual War against the Native People: The Bull *Inter Caetera* (Alexander VI), May 4, 1493,” accessed January 30, 2017, <http://doctrineofdiscovery.org>. Emphasis added.

racial and religious attitudes that they and their cultures, religions and governments were superior to non-Christian European peoples.¹⁰

The Doctrine of Discovery has never been formally denounced by subsequent Popes, although many of its tenets have been chipped away over the years.¹¹ Only more recently has the U.S. Government recognized the incongruence of this doctrine of Christian origin with basic human rights. In 2009, Congress issued a statement that:

(1) recognizes that there have been years of official depredations, ill-conceived policies, and the breaking of covenants by the federal government regarding Indian tribes; (2) apologizes on behalf of the people of the United States to all Native Peoples for the many instances of violence, maltreatment, and neglect inflicted upon them by U.S. citizens; (3) urges the President to acknowledge such wrongs; and (4) commends state governments that have begun reconciliation efforts and encourages all state governments to work toward reconciling their relationships with Indian tribes within their boundaries.¹²

It is a weak apology, buried as it is in a Department of Defense appropriations bill. The disclaimer at the end perhaps signals the reasons why we struggle to admit our collective guilt: we are fearful of opening Pandora's box. Replacing the lid might be costly, if not impossible to do. Cognizant of this, Congress, composed overwhelmingly of lawyers, concludes their "apology" with "nothing in this section authorizes or supports any claim, or serves as a settlement of a claim, against the United States."¹³

It would be foolish to expect much more from politicians who are perpetually running for re-election. The church is another matter, though, and the church needs to

¹⁰ World Council of Churches Executive Committee, "Statement on the doctrine of discovery and its enduring impact on Indigenous Peoples" (Bossey, Switzerland), February 17, 2012, accessed February 2, 2017, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/executive-committee/2012-02/statement-on-the-doctrine-of-discovery-and-its-enduring-impact-on-indigenous-peoples>.

¹¹ Later edicts from Rome denounced slavery and in the 17th Century, Pope Urban VIII ordered that anyone still owning Indian slaves be excommunicated.

¹² Section 8113, H.R.3326—Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2010. 111th Congress (2009-2010), December 19, 2009, became public law no. 111-118.

¹³ Section 8113, H.R.3326—Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2010.

wrestle with and resolve the sad fact that the Doctrine of Discovery originates with her. Furthermore, as has been illustrated in previous chapters, the church has been an active agent of the genocide that began with the “discovery” of lands belonging to “pagans.” Admission of guilt, repentance, and apologies have been slow in coming, which is shameful, but late is better than never; it has to be.

Better late than never includes the World Council of Churches’ “Statement on the doctrine of discovery and its enduring impact on Indigenous Peoples.” Issued *in 2012*, almost 1,000 years after *Terra Nullius*, the executive committee denounces the Doctrine of Discovery as being “fundamentally opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and as a violation of the inherent human rights that all individuals and peoples have received from God.”¹⁴ The damage can never be undone, for the effects of sin are not erased just because the sinner feels remorse. But these words will be better late than never, if they are followed by action that leads to healing.

It has taken the church five centuries since the Conquest to realize that Christ had nothing to do with the Doctrine of Discovery. Is it any wonder then, that “after 500 years of active missionary effort, only three to five percent of the Native population are born-again Christians [and why] on some reservations the figure is less than one percent”?¹⁵ A primary obstacle to the Native American “hearing” the gospel has been the church itself! Even today, the message of the church to the Native American has been that being Christian means not being Indian: “By and large, Native American people have not found the new life and freedom promised in the gospel of Jesus Christ but, rather, have

¹⁴ World Council of Churches Executive Committee.

¹⁵ Richard Twiss, *One Church, Many Tribes: Following Jesus the Way God Made You* (Bloomington, MN: Chosen Books, 2014), 55.

experienced ongoing pain within a Western culture that is both alien and condemning, even genocidal against indigenous people.”¹⁶

Two Nations, Similar Fates

I have already recounted how colonizers invaded Rama territory and the devastation that followed. While indigenous nations in North America left a trail of tears during forced removals from ancestral lands, the Rama were being trampled upon by successive waves of invaders, from Britain, the USA, Spain, and finally Nicaragua. Today, they face imminent danger posed by the *Gran Canal*, a project which includes an inter-coastal waterway, but also a railway, and an oil pipeline. The Rama are not the only indigenous nation under this type of threat; the Lakota Sioux are fighting an oil pipeline as well, a project which they claim violates a treaty with the U.S. government. There are numerous parallels in the stories of these two nations.

After the failure of an 1851 treaty with multiple defeated indigenous nations, in 1868 a new treaty was signed at Fort Laramie, creating the Great Sioux Reservation. The reservation encompassed lands to the west of the Missouri River in what is now South Dakota, including the Black Hills. The agreed-upon terms specified that the “Great Sioux Nation retained off-reservation hunting rights to a much larger area, south to the Republican and Platte Rivers, and east to the Big Horn Mountains.”¹⁷ The Fort Laramie

¹⁶ Twiss, 27.

¹⁷ Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, “History,” accessed February 2, 2017, <http://standingrock.org/history>.

treaty established “an undisputed territory... created in perpetuity, and guarded from trespass by the U.S. military.”¹⁸ In it, the United States government

pledged that the Great Sioux Reservation, including the Black Hills, would be ‘set apart for the absolute and undisturbed use and occupation’ of the Sioux Nation (Sioux), and that no treaty for the cessation of any part of the reservation would be valid as against the Sioux unless executed and signed by at least three-fourths of the adult male Sioux population.¹⁹

White settlers considered the land worthless: “the soil was dry and brittle; the growing season was short and the semi-arid summers provided little rainfall for significant agricultural development.”²⁰ Yet the government expected the Lakota Sioux, “a nomadic hunting and foraging people for the previous 200 years,” to farm that land, and adopt ways of living “antithetical to the Lakota system, because they would necessitate alteration of the landscape and a breaking of the union between the land and the people.”²¹

The Lakota would soon learn that this latest promise of “absolute and undisturbed use” would not last for even a decade. In 1874, Lt. Colonel George Armstrong Custer and his regiment trespassed onto the land, directly violating the Fort Laramie treaty. However, they found gold in those hills; word quickly spread, and the rush to the Black Hills was on. The United States quickly “forgot” its contractual commitment to the Sioux; instead it dispatched Custer “with the specific goal of removing Sioux Tribes.”²² As the saying goes, “the rest is history.”

¹⁸ Benjamin Jewell, "Lakota Struggles for Cultural Survival: History, Health, and Reservation Life" Paper 19, *Nebraska Anthropologist* (2006): 131, accessed February 5, 2017, <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nebanthro/19>.

¹⁹ Jewell, 132.

²⁰ Jewell.

²¹ Jewell, 132-133.

²² Jewell, 133.

Custer's "last stand" at Little Big Horn resulted in his defeat, but it gave the government an excuse to adopt a more punitive policy toward the Sioux and insist on a new treaty. Known as the "sign or starve" treaty, aid that had been promised according to the terms of the 1868 Fort Laramie treaty was cut off, and tribal leaders were forced to abandon the Black Hills. Finally, the Act of 1876 was signed by only 15% of the Lakota, far below the required 75% specified by the Fort Laramie treaty, and "in the end, the area of land lost comprised nearly 90%" of the territory that had initially been promised to the Sioux.²³

Fast forward to the twenty-first century, and the Lakota are facing yet another violation of the Treaty of Fort Laramie, which has never been renegotiated, so from the perspective of the Sioux, it still governs. Just as the Rama are fighting what appears to be a losing battle against an unwanted canal, railway and pipeline, the Lakota Sioux are fighting what will likely be a losing battle against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) from being built in their back yard. Although for much of 2016, the story was eclipsed by farcical presidential election campaigns (another Nicaraguan parallel), the DAPL resistance has more recently garnered media attention.

The DAPL would cross the Missouri River, just north of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. There are many issues involved, the environmental impact of an oil spill on the only source of drinking water being just one of them. The Lakota claim that the Treaty of Fort Laramie requires they be consulted regarding projects that could affect sacred sites, whether or not officially part of reservation lands. Thus, it is one more instance of the United States disregarding its treaty commitment with the American

²³ Jewell, 134.

Indian, one more instance of the powerful using its military might to get its own way: in the middle of a Dakota winter, rubber bullets, water cannons, tear gas, and mass arrests have been used against the protestors at Standing Rock.²⁴ An overwhelming display of force involving law enforcement from nine states, at a cost of—so far—\$33 million to taxpayers, and the situation remains unresolved.²⁵

Thousands of people have come out in opposition to the pipeline's construction, with some assembling at the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation—where construction of the 'black snake' has already begun—in a gesture of solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux and other Native American groups. The situation has escalated so dramatically that the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has sent human rights observers to investigate alleged intimidation tactics and harsh and humiliating treatment by the law enforcement at Standing Rock.²⁶

This is mentioned not to opine as to the merits of the pipeline or whether it violates a treaty; however, it does illustrate the continuing mistrust between Native Americans and the U.S. government. From the perspective of the Lakota Sioux, they might as well be in Nicaragua. Indeed, the similarities to the Rama story are stunning. In Nicaragua, the Autonomy Statute and demarcation laws "guarantee" peaceful enjoyment of indigenous lands, but continue to be ignored by the government. The latest threat, that of the *Gran Canal*, is just one more example; it is similar to the DAPL, only far more expansive in scope.

²⁴ Joshua Barajas, "Police deploy water hoses, tear gas, against Standing Rock protestors," *PBS Newshour*, November 21, 2016, accessed February 5, 2017, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/police-deploy-water-hoses-tear-gas-against-standing-rock-protesters>.

²⁵ T.J. Nelson, "DAPL Protests Costing Local N.D. Taxpayers, State \$33 Million" KVRr Local News, February 13, 2017, accessed February 14, 2017, <http://www.kvrr.com/2017/02/13/dapl-protests-costing-local-n-d-taxpayers-state-33-million>.

²⁶ Lauren Kimmel, "Does the Dakota Access Pipeline Violate Treaty Law?" *Michigan Journal of International Law*, Vol. 38 (November 17, 2016), accessed February 5, 2017, <http://www.mjilonline.org/does-the-dakota-access-pipeline-violate-treaty-law/#>.

In 1876, a small minority of Sioux leaders signed a treaty under duress, ceding the Black Hills to the government. On January 10, 2016, Rama leaders signed an agreement granting permission for the *Gran Canal* to be built on their lands (Appendix F), a death warrant for the last village where the native Rama tongue is still spoken with regularity. However, just as the U.S. ignored the 75% requirement of the 1868 treaty with the Sioux, Nicaragua has ignored the “free and informed” consent requirement of the Autonomy Statute, the “treaty” made with the indigenous of the Caribbean coast and signed into law in 1987. On February 5, 2016—three weeks later—the Rama filed an appeal (“*recurso de amparo*”) to stay the agreement (Appendix G), alleging that they had signed under duress, had been deprived of access to an attorney, and did not understand the terms of the accord.

Both governments share a common history of forgetfulness, but the American Indian, it seems, has a long memory. For example, the Lakota Sioux still insist that the Black Hills belong to them. They consistently demand that they be returned, claiming that their eviction from the land violated the treaty. The Lakota sued the U.S. government, and in 1980—more than one hundred years later—the Supreme Court ruled that “the land... had been taken from them wrongfully, and \$102 million was set aside as compensation.”²⁷ A trust fund now worth over \$1 *billion* continues to accrue interest, because the Sioux refuse to touch it. To take the money would justify a “sale” that they never agreed to; “the Sioux tribes have always maintained that the confiscation was

²⁷ Francine Uenuma and Mike Fritz, “Why the Sioux Are Refusing \$1.3 Billion,” *PBS Newshour*, August 24, 2011, accessed January 30, 2017, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/north_america-july-dec11-blackhills_08-23/.

illegal and the tribes... have maintained that position since 1877.”²⁸ They want the land; for them, it is not about the money.

That the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the indigenous Sioux is a stunning victory, but the decision did not return the land to them. Perhaps at the governmental level more progress can be made—much of the Black Hills is public land—and at least some of it *could* be returned. Still, the root of the problem, which provides legal precedent regarding First Nations lands even today, did not originate with the government; it is based on legal precedent that is rooted in the Doctrine of Discovery.

We can and should advocate for a “righting of wrongs” through the political and judicial processes, but my principal concern is the church, as she has played an active role throughout history, even before she carried European culture disguised in gospel clothing to the Indian. There are instances of groups, denominations, and individuals having confessed their remorse and shame, but in general, the church catholic has not. However, if the world is ever to experience God’s *shalom*, if the *church* is ever to fully embody *shalom*, she must repent, both in word and deed, and seek forgiveness from God and from those whom she has harmed. Then we can move beyond an “us” and “them” mentality, move beyond a victim versus oppressor relationship to one of, as the Bible says, “equality” (1Cor 8:14, NIV). As Tinker observes,

Our continued existence represents something of an embarrassment for white America since we serve as a constant reminder of America’s history of violence. Yet the guilt will not simply evaporate with the final death of Indian people.... We will always present Americans with a choice. Either confess and acknowledge that history and move beyond it in a constructive, healing way, or engage the addicts’

²⁸ Mario Gonzalez, in Uenuma and Fritz. Gonzalez, according to the article, is general counsel for the Oglala Sioux.

device of denial and keep those memories deeply suppressed and repressed where they will continue to fester and disrupt all of American life and well-being.”²⁹

Christ and Whose Culture?³⁰

Native Christian pastor and activist Richard Twiss recounts that, after he accepted Christ, he struggled to integrate his new faith with his Lakota heritage, so he sought advice from a pastor:

I distinctly remember him opening the Bible he was carrying and reading from Galatians 3:28 (NIV), where Paul wrote, ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’ After reading the passage, this pastoral leader commented on how cultures should all blend together for us as Christians. He then concluded, ‘So, Richard, don’t worry about being Indian; just be like us.’³¹

Twiss took the advice to heart: “So for the next eight years I lived the Christian life as it was culturally modeled for me by non-Native friends.” Only later did he realize that the message really was “embrace our White culture as the only Christian culture.”³² He was trying to conform to something “less than” who he really was. Likening it to the “bad haircuts” given to Indian children in boarding school, he says “after 500 years it’s time for the Body of Christ to let First Nations people choose their own hairstyles.”³³

Do indigenous people really need to choose between native spiritual traditions and following Jesus? Who gets to decide? Before “we” dare to tell “them” where they are “wrong,” we need to sit down and get to know one another better. Maybe we should ask

²⁹ Tinker, “American Indian Traditions,” in De La Torre, Miguel A., ed., *Handbook of U.S. Theologies of Liberation* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 244.

³⁰ Kent Annan, “Christ and Whose Culture?” (Sojourners Magazine, June 2009), 3, accessed May 4, 2015, <http://sojo.net/magazine/2009/06/christ-and-whose-culture>.

³¹ Twiss, 33.

³² Twiss.

³³ Twiss, 27.

them to tell us where “we” are wrong. After all, our hermeneutics gave us the Doctrine of Discovery. How could it have taken five hundred years for us to recognize the heresy of it?

Christianity, which had been forced upon the First Nations throughout the Americas, has not been kind to them. They were never “invited either to develop their own Christian theology or to join the wider church’s theological conversation.”³⁴ However, Native American theology has much to contribute: “Native American ‘theologies’ ... tend to center around common themes of community-based spirituality instead of individualism,” echoing the words of Paul, “if one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it” (1Cor 12:26). The Indian takes “holistic approaches to life and nature”; exercising dominion is a stewardship responsibility. For the Native, emphasis is on “the practice of faith in response to the gospel rather than emphasizing only right belief.”³⁵ Empty words accomplish nothing: “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder” (Jas 2:19).

Tinker provides us with one example of why we should question certain hermeneutical conclusions, even well-established ones. The Exodus story of Israel’s liberation from Egypt and conquest of pagan lands—the Promised Land—helped to elevate the conquest of the Americas to a noble cause for God’s people. However, if the Gospel truly is for *all people, of all nations*, then we need to be more careful, less triumphal, about how we interpret such stories. The Exodus “has proven a powerful

³⁴ Annan, 3.

³⁵ Annan.

liberating story for African-Americans. Yet for American Indians ... the conquest narrative is one in which we always discover ourselves to be the Canaanites, the conquered, and never the Israelites.”³⁶ I do not have the answer to that conundrum, but it would be worthwhile discussing it with the “Canaanites.”

A second illustration comes from Roman Catholic priest and biblical scholar Pablo Richard Guzmán, whom I met about eight years ago. He wrote an essay on the story of the Tower of Babel.³⁷ To me, the meaning of the story had always been obvious: the people aspired to be like God, so God thwarted their plans, scattering them by dividing their tongues. Thus, the legend goes, we have the origin of multiple languages. Richard’s hermeneutics turn that premise on its head: The workers doing the construction were slave laborers working for the elite. They were building the ziggurat *for* the wealthy and powerful. As a means of domination, the slave classes had been forced to abandon their native tongues, since language also conveys cultural identity, and adopting the language of the oppressor is a submissive act. God, whose ‘preferential option for the poor’ aligns him against oppression, thwarts the plans of the powerful and *restores* the languages that had been lost. As a white person of privilege, I never would have seen this possibility, but Richard makes a strong case. When we stay locked in our own world, with our own people, reinforcing our own hermeneutics, we never hear voices from the margins that can enrich our understanding of God’s world.

³⁶ Tinker, 236.

³⁷ I have been unable to locate the source of the essay, which I read several years ago. I believe that it was an article in *Pasos*, a periodical published by the *Departamento Ecumenico de Investigaciones* (DEI), for which Richard is an editor and regular contributor.

One Body, Many Parts

We are one body with many parts (1Cor 12:12). Some of our appendages have gone to great lengths to amputate others, so the body suffers from self-inflicted wounds which have yet to heal. The entire world, it seems, was caught up in the political-religious fervor that propelled the Conquest. The colonizing powers from Europe may have returned to their homelands, but a colonial mindset persists. This is how environmental protection organizations can claim victory for protecting the *Reserva Biológica Río Indio-Maiz*, while the truth is, the Rama have protected it since before Columbus. This is also how the controversy over the Dakota Access Pipeline, a dispute between the Lakota, the government, and big business, is primarily portrayed as a matter of environmental safety, rather than of treaty violations.

The powerful do all they can to keep the Indian invisible. This is one reason why, even though the central focus of this project has been to prepare Hilario McCrea John for the preaching ministry among his people, I have included stories that show how the indigenous throughout the Americas have all been swept up by the dragnet of colonialism, even to this present day. Since the Rama are relatively cut off from the rest of the world, I try to include them in the greater Native American narrative by carrying them news of their relatives in the U.S., as embarrassing as it has been for me to do. I have shared some of stories from the “missionary conquest”; I have shown them photographs of teepees at Standing Rock in the dead of a Dakota winter. It does not change their circumstances; but at least they know that they are not the only victims in this continuing narrative of conquest, and *perhaps* it will help them continue in their own struggles for survival.

A better knowledge of a more accurately told history is important to the church. Context matters! Just as biblical criticism attempts to incorporate the geographical, linguistic, cultural, socio-political contexts of Bible times into present-day hermeneutics, we also must incorporate the history of all peoples in the “hermeneutical circle,” and listen to voices from the margins, because we are all connected. To continue to give pre-eminence to “dead European males” marginalizes everyone else, and distorts the circle. Observes Native theologian Randy Woodley:

It’s a problem of being heard. I feel like 500 years ago, maybe God did bring the white [people] over. But it was supposed to be something mutual, where we learned from each other. Instead the white [people] conquered, helped out by their understanding of Christianity. Five hundred years later, we ask ourselves, now are people ready to listen?³⁸

One thing is clear; if the percentage of Christians among Native Americans really is under five percent (I would guess that, among the Rama of the Indian River it less than ten percent), then we can safely conclude that the church has failed to carry to them a gospel that was recognizable as the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This harsh reality ought to give us all something to pray about. We can pray that the Spirit will break through the obstacles that we have put in their path; we can pray for forgiveness, too, not only for the sins committed in God’s name in the past, but for the ways we continue to sin today, through our failure to confess and repent.

Our repentance may lead us to finding ways to help our indigenous relatives, too. However, especially given our complicity in superimposing culture as gospel, which we carried to them as uninvited intruders, only at the *invitation* of the Native church should we go. We invaded before; it did not end well. Let us not repeat that scenario, ever.

³⁸ Randy Woodley, In Annan.

We will only experience *shalom* when the rest of humanity, the rest of Creation, can do the same. The church is God's chosen instrument to bring *shalom*, where strife, war, enmity, and injustice cease, and Creation experiences the completeness, wholeness and perfection that was God's original design. The church is the:

hands, feet, eyes, and mouth of Christ on earth, [and God] has sent her to every geographical location, to every man [sic] and every structure of society. Under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, the church is to continue the task initiated by Jesus in his preaching ministry and fortified and confirmed in his redemptive work on the cross. Consequently, the church cannot allow herself to be bound by geographical, social, economic, or political boundaries.³⁹

The bride of Christ is not made of bricks and stones, an obvious truth that is easily forgotten when we divide her into "us" and "them," a division that colonialism has taught us so well to enforce. Perhaps we do this in part to defend our own syncretistic tendencies. The Jewish Christian missionaries in Galatia, and the European and Euro-American missionaries to the indigenous peoples of the continent, demonstrated how easily syncretism can creep in and distort the Gospel. Their fears of syncretism among First Nations were driven, in part, by their own syncretism! We all are guilty of it; we simply fail to recognize it in ourselves. Syncretistic religiosity continues to serve as:

theological justification of colonialism, and more recently of neocolonialism ... [has] been the basis for a paternalistic relationship with national churches; a culturally alienating religiosity; and ethics of neutrality and noninvolvement; and an evangelism that is either totally divorced from the gut-issues of an oppressed society or that has a one-sided orientation to the 'beyond,' or an evangelism that is reduced to social assistance (a 'band-aid operation' as some would call it), paying little attention to the real causes of the problem (both spiritual and structural) and refusing to penetrate into the deeper dimensions of the gospel (life, death, guilt, reconciliation, etc.)."⁴⁰

³⁹ Costas, 28-29.

⁴⁰ Costas, 15.

Nonetheless, the church is catholic “because she has been given to all of humanity, and ‘any nationalistic, racist, or sectarian notion is categorically rejected.’”⁴¹ Catholicity demands that all “men and women ... be themselves in their anthropological fullness. That is, the church embraces people of all cultures. Then, through the redeeming grace of Christ, she enriches their respective cultures, gives greater depth to their talents and abilities, and restores them”⁴² to wholeness, to fullness of their humanity. In other words, instead of demanding conformity, she encourages diversity. It also means that we listen to and learn from one another, so that we can become the bride of Christ that is worthy of his love. *Shalom*.

⁴¹ Costas, 27.

⁴² Costas, 27.

APPENDIX A

Appeal from Hilario McCrea John to help with Rama Projects

(April 2012)¹

Dear Friends of SIGA:

My name is Hilario McCrea John, but many people call me “Coyote.” I am an American Indian of the Rama Nation, a people that is indigenous to the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua. The Rama people can trace their roots here back to long before Nicaragua became a country. We are the original inhabitants of the Atlantic Coast. We know our history, and we know this is our territory.

Our Rama culture is important to us, and the older generation teaches it to the younger ones. We teach them how to live in the forest, and how to take care of it, not destroy it. To the Rama people, we see the rain forest like a big refrigerator. It keeps our food for us. Then, if we want to eat a wild pig, we go look for it and find it. If we want to eat fish, we go fishing and catch what we need today. Or maybe a wild turkey. Maybe we build a house and have a little farm on an acre or two, and stay there for a few years, but if we see that the land is suffering, we relocate and let that spot recover. We never go into the jungle and think, “let’s cut this all down.” Too many other people think that way, though, and they invade our lands, even today. That is why the rain forest is disappearing.

My generation, we lived in the forest, and we didn’t have shoes. We hunted with bow and spear. It was a hard life, but the Indian is tough. Now, though, it is even harder to live the way our ancestors did, because the government has turned our land into a biological reserve, and has made laws to protect the rain forest, which is what we were doing anyway. Now it is almost impossible to live the old way, so most of us have left the forest, because the laws don’t let us hunt and farm like we used to do, and so our children can go to school. So we live in a town, next door to the Nicaraguans of Spanish descent. We have things like electricity and public schools. That is good. But we live, one house right next to another, with no place to plant a garden. We have to buy more of our food, since we can’t hunt. And when you are very poor, you don’t always have the money to buy food with.

Yes, we are poor, but the most important need of our community is to find new ways to preserve our culture, so that the Rama people don’t go extinct like some rain forest animals have done. This is why the project we are doing is very important to us. We need help to do it, but it is our project that comes from our own hearts.

¹ Letter was dictated to me and the English ‘standardized’ by me.

First, as a people of faith, we need our own church, where we can learn about God in our own tongue. The Rama people speak English. We learned it from the Moravian missionaries who came to Nicaragua centuries ago. Some of us are from the northern Rama territory; I am originally from Rama Cay. Up there, we have a Moravian church, and our pastor is a Rama Indian. Down here, on the Indian River, we do not have a church. The pastor from Rama Cay comes to visit a couple of times of year, and we always have to ask permission to use other churches so we can have weddings and baptisms. This makes our people sad. The Moravians started working with our people first, teaching us traditions like the “Lovefeast” where we get together to show love for each other, and to remember God’s love for us. In the lovefeast, we eat sweet bread to remind us of the sweetness of faith. We want to preserve those traditions in our church here on the Indian River.

Next, we also need a place to gather our people together as a community and right now we don’t have a place. We need to continue to teach our children our ways, so that they might be proud of being Rama and celebrate the good that is in our culture, but we don’t have a place where we can do that. The church building will fill that need also. We want to make sure our children remember their ancestors, people like my great-grandfather, Feber McRey. He was our tribal doctor. He knew all the herbs and natural medicines. Regular doctors would come to learn about his cures from him. My great-great-grandfather, Ferdinand, kept a history book about the Rama people. He gave it to me, and I use it to teach my children.

We also want to be able to do projects that help our community economically, so that we are able to take care of our own people better, and not look to the government or strangers for help all the time. Because we live in a village, where we can’t hunt for our food, it makes life very hard, and there are almost no jobs. Maybe some of the men pick up a little construction work here or there, and maybe a tourist comes and wants to go fishing, but there just are no jobs here. So part of our vision for the community is to start some projects that might help us to earn some money, so that we have funds to respond to community needs, help the children with their education expenses, or even just to have a little Christmas party in December. Maybe we can plant a community garden, or sell Indian crafts, or food.

We, the Rama community of the Indian River, are forty-three families, about 300 people young and old. We are trying to find new ways to live together, according to our ancestral customs, but in a different place under different circumstances. We are not exactly sure how to do that, but we believe in the power of the Almighty God, and we are trusting him that things will change for the better. We believe that God wants the Rama people to have a better life, and we are holding onto that hope.

Hilario McCrea John
Indian River Mission

APPENDIX B

Scenes from Greytown¹



*Figure 1: The "Draga"
(Great Britain)*



Figure 2: Remains of Steamship (unknown origin)



Figure 3: Gate to "Sabine" Cemetery (USA)

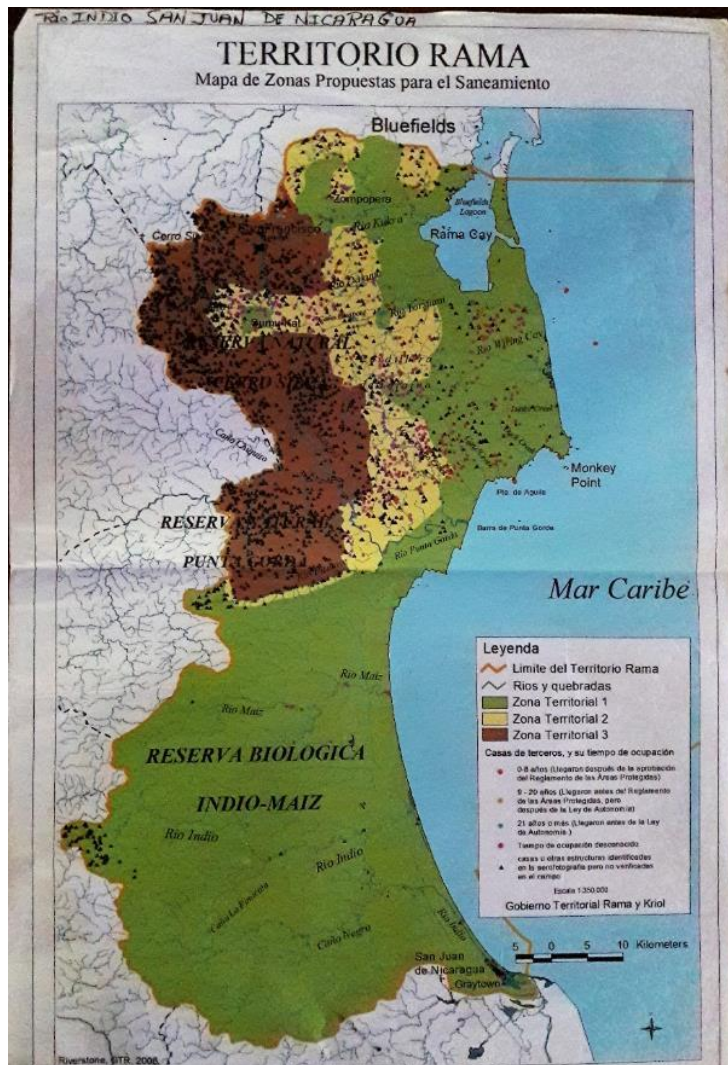


*Figure 5: Presbítero Juan Alvarado
(1898). Bullet hole from the battle
during the civil war.*

¹ Named after Sir Charles Grey, governor of Jamaica, 1847-1853.

APPENDIX C

Rama Territorial Map as of 2006¹



“Servicio Geodesico Interamericano, se prohíbe molestar” 1977. Inter-American Geodesic Service marker installed as part of demarcation process to protect indigenous territorial boundaries.



¹ Riverstone, GTR (Gobierno Territorial Rama) 2006. From Hilario McCrea John files.

APPENDIX D

Map of Nicaragua

(Regions VII and VIII are Indigenous “Autonomous”)¹



¹ Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Cartographic Section, Map No. 3932 Rev.3, United Nations, May 2004.

APPENDIX E

The Proposed *Gran Canal*

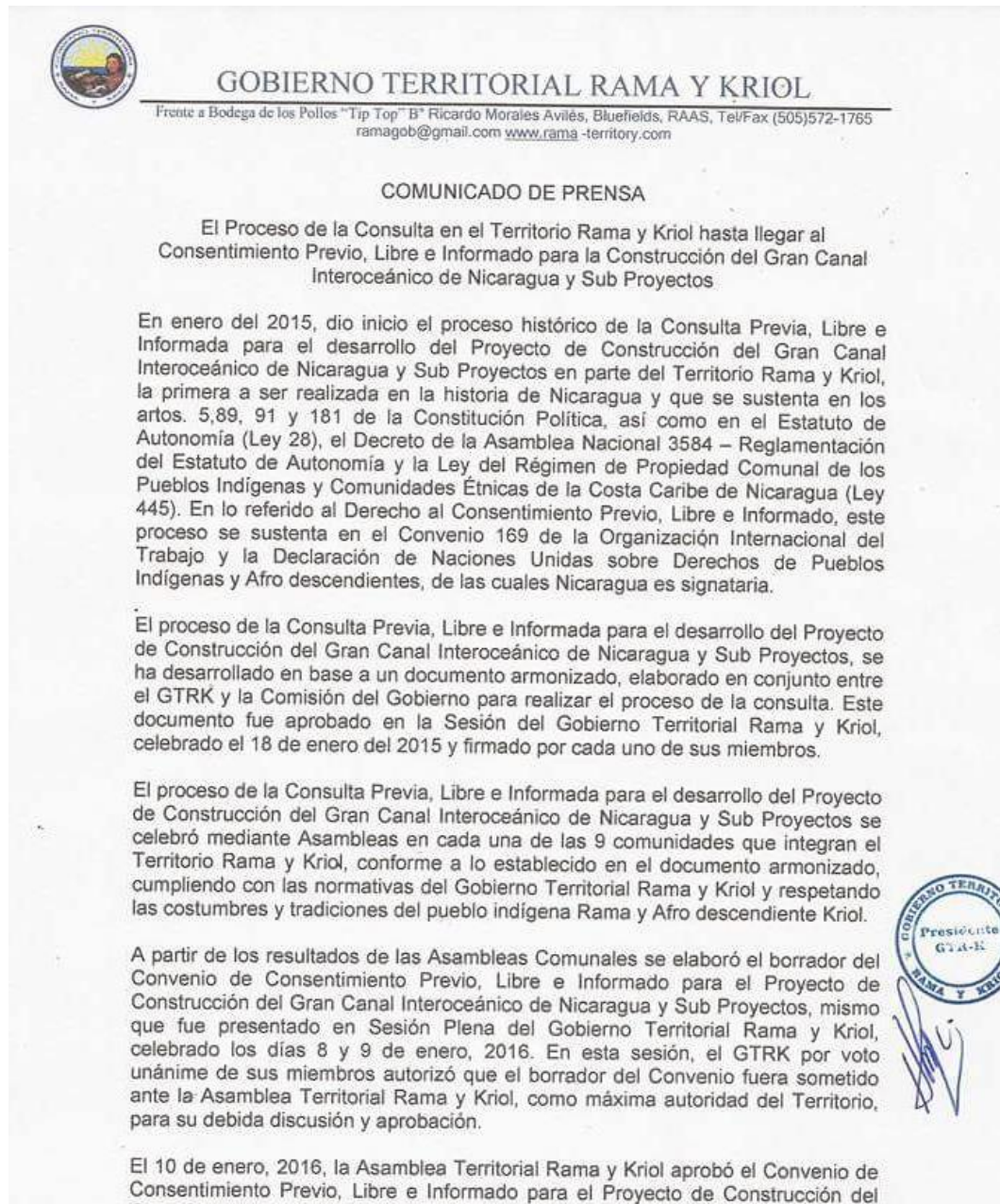
Engineers for the Hong Kong-based HKND Group said the canal would be between 230m and 520m wide and 27.6m deep.



Nicaragua said it had chosen the route so it would avoid areas of great biodiversity, indigenous territories and environmentally protected lands.

APPENDIX F

Rama-Kriol Territorial Government Approves Canal Project



Section of January 10, 2016 press release from the Rama-Kriol Territorial Government (GTR-K) announces approval of the canal project, following the “process of previous, free, and informed consultation” (*el proceso de la Consulta Previa*). On February 5, 2016 the GTR-K filed a complaint stating that they had signed the accord under duress.

APPENDIX G

GTR-K Complains Canal Accord Signed Under Duress



GOBIERNO TERRITORIAL RAMA Y KRIOL

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Comunicado de Prensa

INDIGENAS DEMANDAN POR COACCION DE FIRMAS PARA EL CANAL DE NIACARGUA

Hoy 5 de febrero de 2016 los señores Santiago Emmanuel Thomas, Rupert Allen Clair Duncan, Víctor Hulse Clair y Alvin McCrea Billis, y miembros de los Gobierno Comunales de Monkey Point, Wiring Cay, Bankukuk Taik y del Gobierno Territorial Rama y Kriol (GTR-K) en el Municipio de Bluefields, Región Autónoma del Caribe Sur (RACS), presentaron un Recurso de Amparo ante el Tribunal de Apelaciones de Bluefields en contra de los funcionarios públicos, Johnny Hodgson Deering, Delegado de la Presidencia de la República en la RACS, Michael Campbell, funcionario de ProNicaribe; Danilo Chang, delegado del megaproyecto del Gran Canal Interoceánico por Nicaragua (GCIN) en la RACS; Rubén López, Ejecutivo del Gobierno Regional de la RACS.

Alegan los demandantes que los funcionarios públicos vulneraron la autodeterminación del pueblo Rama y Kriol al haber presionado desde el día 8 hasta el día 10 de enero de 2016 a miembros del GTR-K para que firmaran un Acta expresando falsamente que se ha realizado la "Consulta Libre, Previa e Informada" en el territorio; y por ende daban su "Consentimiento" autorizando a miembros del GTR-K para realizar negociaciones con la Autoridad del Gran Canal Interoceánico de Nicaragua.

Durante las reuniones los funcionarios públicos demandados ignoraron la oposición de los Demandantes, y de otros miembros del GTR-K, en el sentido que ejercer su derecho a la presencia de un abogado de su elección, para comprender adecuadamente el contenido de lo que le imponían que firmaran; y también la solicitud de la presencia de observadores internacionales en todo el proceso; así como la explicación técnica de parte de profesionales independientes del contenido del Estudio de Impacto Ambiental y Social (EIAS) del Gran Canal Interoceánico por Nicaragua (GCIN) aprobado por el Gobierno de Nicaragua en 2015; y sobre todo, la solicitud de ser informados suficientemente de los impactos que el GCIN tendría en sus comunidades. Sin embargo los funcionarios los coaccionaban para firmar, por lo que dieron a conocer en su momento esta situación a los medios de comunicación nacionales e internacionales y ahora de manera formal al sistema judicial de Nicaragua.

Aunque la Asamblea concluyó con la firma, por algunos miembros del GTR-K de un Acta, el día 10 de enero de 2016, y no del Convenio inicialmente presentado por los funcionarios; para sorpresa de los demandantes, una vez firmada, cuando tuvieron acceso al texto del Acta, se encontraron que el numeral 1 del Acta dice: "1.- La Asamblea Territorial Rama y Kriol aprueba el Convenio de Consentimiento Previo, Libre e Informado para la Construcción del Gran Canal Interoceánico de Nicaragua y Sub Proyectos en el Área Requerida (263Km2) del Territorio Rama y Kriol". Consentimiento que nunca dieron y solamente se les dijo que los 18 miembros del GTR-K tenían que ir a Managua a "negociar" con la Comisión Nacional de Desarrollo del Gran Canal Interoceánico de Nicaragua.

Los demandantes han protestado ante los funcionarios públicos, por medios privados y públicos, verbales y escritos, sin obtener respuestas satisfactorias. Por lo que los demandantes consideran que el proceso hasta ahora realizado no cumple con los estándares nacionales e internacionales de una *consulta libre, previa e informada* y mucho menos se ha llegado al *Consentimiento*. Para lo que es esencial que el Estado de Nicaragua conduzca un proceso de *Buena Fe*, por lo que instan al señor Presidente de la República, Comandante Daniel Ortega, a no permitir estas ilegales y opresivas prácticas en su gobierno; y en su lugar, tomar la oportunidad para construir un nuevo modelo de relación con los pueblos indígena Rama y Kriol, propiciando un modelo de desarrollo con respeto a los derechos humanos de estos pueblos.

Para mayor información contactar a los Seres: Clair Duncan (505) 8428-8022 Hulse Clair (505) 86586066 y McCrea Billis (505) 58651005.

February 5, 2016: community governments of Monkey Point, Wiring Cay, Bankukuk Taik, and the GTR-K file a complaint (*Curso de Amparo*) claiming they had been pressured into signing the agreement against their will.

APPENDIX H

Hermeneutics Workshops

LECCIÓN I: INTRODUCCIÓN A LA HERMENÉUTICA

En este curso desarrollaremos las «herramientas investigadoras» para estudiar la Biblia, con el fin de ampliar nuestra capacidad de interpretar y aplicar los principios bíblicos en nuestras vidas y en nuestros papeles como líderes, con el fin de animar a los feligreses hacer lo mismo. Como líder, no basta leer la Biblia en una forma devocional; hay que estudiar la Biblia y todo que la rodea.

¡Prepárense!

En el ejercicio del liderato cristiano, es nuestra responsabilidad hacer el mayor esfuerzo posible para guiar al pueblo hacia un mayor entendimiento acerca de la Biblia y la voluntad de Dios para todos. Por supuesto reconociendo que, como dijo Pablo, «*vemos por un espejo, oscuramente*» (1 Corintios 13:12). Jamás tocaremos el fondo de la sabiduría que contiene el tesoro que es la Biblia, pero hagamos todo el esfuerzo para profundizar nuestro entendimiento, porque lo que enseñamos o predicamos, afecta a muchas personas.

El Señor nos amonestó: «*cualquiera que haga tropezar a uno de estos pequeñitos que creen en mí, mejor le fuera si se le atase una piedra de molino al cuello, y se le arrojase en el mar*» (Marcos 9:42, Mateo 18:6, Lucas 17:2). Hay que sintonizar la mente para dialogar con la Biblia, hacer preguntas a ella, y buscar las respuestas. Confiamos que el Espíritu Santo guiará nuestros pasos. Consultamos los recursos teológicos tales como comentarios y diccionarios bíblicos para ampliar nuestro entendimiento de la Biblia y de los tiempos bíblicos. Como hicieron los discípulos anteriores, hay que sentarnos a los pies del Maestro.

La Crítica Bíblica

¿Qué quiere decir la «crítica bíblica»? No quiere decir criticar la Biblia. La crítica bíblica es el proceso de investigar la Biblia en forma sistemática, tomando en cuenta, por ejemplo:

- el proceso de la «canonización» de los libros incluidos (o excluidos) de la Biblia
- los contextos en que los libros fueron escritos
- los idiomas, las culturas, la situación económica y política, los costumbres religiosos y paganos de los tiempos bíblicos,
- de qué manera los primeros oyentes entendieron el mensaje de la Biblia.
- ... y más.

La Exégesis

La meta de la crítica bíblica es realizar una buena *exégesis* del texto, la cual implica el proceso de estudiar la Biblia para obtener el significado del texto. «*Exégesis*» significa extraer el significado de un texto dado. Por el contrario, la «*eiségesis*» significa insertar las interpretaciones personales, haciendo que la Biblia nos diga lo que queremos oír; esto es precisamente lo que pretendemos evitar mediante una buena *exégesis*. Nuestro papel, como servidores llamados por Dios, es analizar el texto objetivamente, escuchar lo que el autor deseaba comunicar a los oyentes de los diversos tiempos bíblicos, y escuchar lo que Dios quiere comunicar a nosotros hoy. El/la intérprete debe evitar la *eiségesis* a toda costa.

LECCION II: LA VARA RECTA QUE LLAMAMOS «BIBLIA»

Es importante conocer la historia del proceso por medio de que hoy en día tenemos ese libro precioso que llamamos «BIBLIA». El proceso se llama «canonización».

El canon bíblico y cómo fue formado

Canon—de la palabra griega *Kanon*, que significa «vara recta». El «canon de la Biblia» está compuesto por los libros que la iglesia cristiana acepta como *libros inspirados por Dios*.

Canonización—el proceso mediante el cual los libros de la Biblia recibieron la aprobación y aceptación final por los líderes de la Iglesia.

En las primeras décadas de lo que llamamos la *iglesia primitiva*, las escrituras eran la *Septuaginta*, que era la **Biblia hebrea** traducida al idioma griego, el lenguaje común. Aunque hay diferencias, la Septuaginta es en su esencia nuestro Antiguo Testamento. Luego circularon entre las iglesias algunas cartas, por ejemplo las epístolas de Pablo.

En el principio, la Iglesia no prestó mucha atención en evaluar la autenticidad de los nuevos escritos, porque pensaba que Jesús iba a volver ya. Sin embargo, los años se marcharon, y los apóstoles y líderes principales (quienes conocieron a Jesús personalmente) poco a poco se murieron. Fue entonces que el *liderazgo* de la Iglesia vio la necesidad de examinar los documentos que circularon entre las iglesias.

Desde casi la fundación de la iglesia cristiana, algunas herejías aparecieron entre los creyentes. Una herejía popular fue el *gnosticismo*. El gnosticismo enseñaba que Jesús nunca tomó la forma de ser humano, es decir, nunca fue hecho de carne, hueso y sangre. Jesús solo era un espíritu que parecía a un SER (véase 1 Juan).

Otros enseñaron que el Dios del Nuevo Testamento, quien es el Dios de amor, no es el mismo Dios que del Antiguo Testamento. Un caso conocido es el de Marción, quien desarrolló su propio «canon», echando fuera el Antiguo Testamento y aún partes del Nuevo Testamento; es decir, ¡se hizo una *eiségesis* de la Biblia misma!

Más bien, aparecieron unos escritos que eran falsos acerca de su autoría, diciendo que eran escritos por uno de los apóstoles. Esas cartas circularon entre las iglesias y causaron confusión en ellas. Otros escritos agregaron palabras adicionales de Jesús, por ejemplo, en el «*evangelio de Tomás*». No hubo escasez de **profetas falsos** que pretendieron compartir una «nueva verdad». El ambiente actual es parecido, hoy surgen

muchos profetas. Es urgente que el líder cristiano conozca la verdad para que las herejías actuales no causen confusiones, y para que cada creyente sepa discernir entre mentira y verdad.

En resumen, con la desaparición de los apóstoles y los testigos oculares que conocieron a Jesús «en vivo», aunado a las herejías y los escritos falsificados, el liderazgo de la Iglesia sabiamente vio la necesidad de evaluar cuidadosamente los documentos que circulaban entre las congregaciones, y lanzaron el proceso de **la canonización** de los escritos bíblicos.

El proceso de la canonización no era rápido ni fácil. No todos involucrados se concordaron acerca de todos los escritos. Era un *proceso humano*, donde los «padres de la Iglesia» evaluaron todos los escritos en uso, para determinar si un libro debe ser incluido o rechazado. Sin embargo, no era simplemente un asunto de opinión. Los libros eran aceptados como un escrito sagrado, o bien rechazados como no-auténticos, de acuerdo con los siguientes criterios:

1. Los Escritos Apostólicos. ¿Fue el libro escrito por uno de los apóstoles originales, o por lo menos bajo la dirección de un apóstol?
2. El Contenido. ¿Es el contenido de carácter espiritual elevado? ¿Contradice el Antiguo Testamento o no? Por este criterio, se eliminaron algunos de los «apócrifos».
 - No hubo acuerdo al cien por ciento, y hoy en día existen diferencias entre el canon de la mayoría de las iglesias protestantes y el de las iglesias católicas y ortodoxas.
3. La Universalidad. ¿Es el libro recibido universalmente en toda la Iglesia? ¿Es citado por otros libros en el canon, o por los líderes de la Iglesia Primitiva?
 - Los líderes cuestionaron la autenticidad de algunos escritos, pero resultaron incluidos por su uso popular en las congregaciones. *Ester* se calificó para el canon por su uso popular.
4. La Inspiración. La última prueba es la inspiración. Solo los libros que dieron evidencia adecuada de haber sido *inspirados divinamente* lograron admisión al canon.

La canonización era un proceso que duró siglos, con muchas opiniones y disputas acerca de cuáles libros son inspirados por Dios y cuáles no. Finalmente, al fin del siglo IV, el concilio ecuménico de Cartago (397 d.C.) afirmó oficialmente los límites del canon del Nuevo Testamento, los demás quedaron fuera.

Para reflexionar: La Biblia a lo largo de la historia



- Hasta el año 367 d.C. no existía ninguna lista completa de los sesenta-y-seis libros que tenemos en la Biblia. Hasta entonces, la Biblia como la conocemos ni siquiera existía. *¡No obstante, la iglesia sobrevivía y crecía!*
- Aún por siglos después de la formación del canon bíblico, muy poca gente tenía acceso directo a ella. Las copias eran pocas. Además, el pueblo era analfabeto. *¡No obstante, la iglesia sobrevivía y crecía!*
- Muy poca gente podía leer los idiomas originales de las sagradas escrituras—el hebreo, el arameo, y el griego. La traducción de Jerónimo, quien la tradujo al latín, el idioma común de aquel tiempo, fue la primera Biblia que por lo menos *algunos* *estudiados* podían leer. Esto sucedió entre los años 382 y 404 d.C. *¡No obstante, la iglesia sobrevivía y crecía!*
- La traducción hecha por Jerónimo se llama la *Vulgata Latina* («vulgata» quiere decir el idioma común). Esta fue adoptada por la iglesia católica romana como la Biblia oficial. Aún muy poca gente tenía acceso directo a las Sagradas Escrituras. *¡No obstante, la iglesia sobrevivía y crecía!*
- Para el pueblo de habla española, no fue hasta 1569—más que *mil quinientos años* después de la resurrección de Jesús—que la Biblia fue traducida al español. Fue traducida por Casiodoro de Reina, quien estudió para ser sacerdote y se convirtió en un predicador del evangelio. *¡No obstante, la iglesia sobrevivía y crecía!*
- Hasta los tiempos más recientes, la mayoría de la población del mundo era analfabeta. No tenían acceso a la Biblia, porque no la podían leer. *¡No obstante, la iglesia sobrevivía y crecía!*

- Existen muchos lugares aún donde la gente habla idiomas en que la Biblia, ni siquiera el Nuevo Testamento, ha sido traducido. *¡No obstante, la iglesia sigue creciendo y cambiando vidas!*

Pregúntese:

- ¿Sin la Biblia, la vara recta de la Iglesia y su pueblo, cómo es posible que la fe cristiana sobrevivió y la Iglesia creció, hasta ahora?
- Recordando que ahora tenemos los resultados de la fe de nuestros antepasados, con todo que ellos aprendieron, experimentaron, y escribieron... ¿cómo afecta su papel de líder de la iglesia?
- ¿Cuál es nuestra responsabilidad como líderes hacia la hermenéutica de la Biblia?

LECCIÓN III: LOS PELIGROS DE UNA INTERPRETACIÓN ERRÓNEA

Dice Jesús:

«Y cualquiera que hiciere tropezar a uno de estos pequeñitos que creen en mí, mejor le fuera si se le atase una piedra de molino al cuello, y se le arrojase al mar. Y si tu mano te fuere ocasión de caer, córtala; mejor te es entrar en la vida manco, que teniendo dos manos ir al infierno, al fuego que nunca será apagado; donde el gusano de ellos no muere, y el fuego nunca se apaga. Y si tu pie te fuere ocasión de caer, córtalo; mejor te es entrar en la vida cojo, que teniendo dos pies ser echado en el infierno, al fuego que nunca será apagado, donde el gusano de ellos no muere, y el fuego nunca se apaga. Y si tu ojo te fuere ocasión de caer, sácalo; mejor te es entrar al reino de Dios con un ojo, que teniendo dos ojos ser echado al fuego del infierno, donde el gusano de ellos no muere, y el fuego nunca se apaga.»

(Marcos 9:42, Mateo 18:6, Lucas 17:2)

La Biblia contiene una diversidad de formas literarias

He aquí, en solo nueve versículos, ejemplos de diversas formas literarias que se encuentra en la Biblia. A Jesús, no le importaba si un gusano vive o no; usaba *lenguaje figurado*. ¡Tampoco es tu pie, o tu ojo, o tu mano, que le hace pecar! Jesús *exageraba por el efecto*—cortar la mano, el pie, sacar el ojo—no son mandamientos para seguir literalmente. Sin embargo, las palabras de Jesús comunican bien, de una manera inolvidable, la gravedad de lastimar el espíritu o la vida de otra persona. Entendemos y recordamos las verdades sin tomar tales consejos de forma literal.

He aquí también, unas advertencias que debemos tomar en cuenta como líderes y pastoras o pastores del rebaño de Dios. Es una gran responsabilidad enseñar a los «pequeños» (no importa la edad) acerca de Dios y su voluntad para ellos. Una interpretación errónea puede resultar en daños muy graves. Tristemente, así ha sido la historia de la iglesia por los siglos, y hoy en día, sigue siendo así.

Tenemos la responsabilidad de ser intérpretes fieles, y evitar el *eiségesis*, buscando la verdad sin importar el «dogma» denominacional o nuestros sentimientos personales. *Ser fiel a Dios es la meta, nada más y nada menos.*

Andamos juntos en un peregrinaje para indagar en las escrituras la voluntad de Dios, no para justificar nuestras presuposiciones, ni siquiera la doctrina de nuestros líderes y denominaciones.

Estamos en este camino con el fin de que el mundo crea en Jesús. Es el único camino para la reconciliación del ser humano con su Creador. Hay que proclamar la Verdad del Verbo, hasta que la voluntad de Dios sea verdaderamente hecha «*en la tierra como en el cielo*» (Mateo 6:10).

La Autoría y Los Diversos Contextos de los Libros de la Biblia

La Biblia fue escrita por muchas personas diferentes, a lo largo de muchos siglos, y en tiempos y lugares muy distintos. Cada autor escribió a su modo, según las circunstancias y la cultura de su tiempo. Por eso, para llegar a un entendimiento más profundo del texto, hay que conocer (al máximo posible) las circunstancias dentro de las cuales escribía cada autor.

Sin embargo, no basta conocer el contexto histórico. Hay que tomar en cuenta, entre otras cosas, el género literario en que fue escrita cada parte de la Biblia.¹ En esta colección de sesenta-y-seis libros canónicos, hay diversos géneros:

- Narración
- Historia
- Poesía
- Proverbios y parábolas
- Biografía
- Profecía y predicación
- Cartas (epístolas), los generales y los pastorales
- Literatura apocalíptica

Si leemos la Biblia entera como si toda es del mismo género literario, escrito dentro el mismo contexto de cultura y época, cometemos un gran error. No es lo mismo leer un libro de la misma manera que uno lee un código de leyes. Uno no lee un libro de profecías de la misma manera en que lea un libro de leyes sacerdotales como Levítico. Uno no lee los Salmos de la misma forma en que lea las cartas de San Pablo. Ante cada tipo tenemos expectativas distintas.

Los géneros literarios son, pues, las diversas formas en que el autor puede expresarse. Todos hacemos lo mismo hasta en nuestras conversaciones, según sea nuestro propósito. Así, el enamorado se dirige a la enamorada de forma distinta de un periodista que hace reportaje acerca de un choque de tren, o de un médico que escribe una receta.

¹Adaptado de http://www.mercaba.org/Caravias/biblia_fe_vida_02.htm

Hay una correspondencia entre el tema y la forma. Un asunto criminal, por ejemplo, encaja bien en la forma narrativa de una novela, pero no ciertamente en la forma de una poesía romántica.

Cada forma literaria tiene su modo especial de presentar la realidad. Una novela romántica se lee con una expectación distinta de como se lee un libro de historia, porque cada forma de lenguaje aborda, a su modo, la realidad. Nadie espera que los personajes de la novela hayan vivido realmente; o si se trata de una novela histórica, que los personajes hayan dicho y hecho en realidad cuanto dicen y hacen en la novela. Unas y otras son formas literarias de captar y expresar la realidad, pero cada cual a su modo.

El *lenguaje figurado* no tiene sentido literal. Dicen una cosa para comunicar algo más. Por ejemplo:

- «*La luna se avergonzará, y el sol se confundirá, cuando Jehová de los ejércitos reine gloriosamente...*» (Isaías 24:23). Obvio, la luna y el sol son cosas reales. Pero por la forma literaria, sabemos que no se refiere a la luna y el sol en forma literal cuando leemos esto.
- «*El SEÑOR es tu guardador; el SEÑOR es tu sombra a tu mano derecha*» (Salmo 121.5). ¿Es cierto que Dios literalmente hace sombra? Pero entendemos el sentido.

Una interpretación errónea puede resultar por razones «inocentes», por la falta de información, entendimiento de la forma literaria, no conocer el contexto bíblico, etcétera. Otras veces las enseñanzas equivocadas provienen de un intento de manipular la Biblia, el cual es un abuso de las Sagradas Escrituras. Por ejemplo, al buscar forma de justificar una doctrina de la iglesia, pase lo que pase, o para soportar una creencia porque le gusta, estos son formas de «cerrar las puertas» a la iluminación del Espíritu Santo, y la Biblia nos enseña «*no apaguéis el Espíritu*» (1 Tesalonicenses 5:19). Se han traído resultados trágicos al mundo:

1. Las persecuciones

En la historia de la Iglesia ha habido enormes confusiones y amargas discusiones por el mero hecho de no haberse dado cuenta de la intención fundamental de ciertos géneros y formas literarias. Se tomaron como noticias históricas algunos textos bíblicos que pretendían simplemente predicar o anunciar un mensaje. En otros casos se tomaron como leyes textos del Nuevo Testamento que no eran más que exhortaciones. Se escucharon como historias reales narraciones noveladas. Se interpretaron todo al pie de la letra, hasta los temas de carácter científico, costumbrista o cultural. La iglesia tiene una historia larga y triste de interpretar erróneamente la Biblia, y con resultados trágicos. Un caso muy famoso es el del señor Galileo Galilei;

Galileo era un científico de Italia quien apoyó la teoría Copérnico acerca del mundo. Eso fue en contra del dogma de la Iglesia. Galileo escribió un libro que fue publicado en 1632, donde dijo que el planeta Tierra no es el centro del universo, y que se mueva, y que es el sol que no se mueva.

La idea de Copérnico, confirmado por Galileo, fue declarado herejía. Galileo fue privado de su libertad. Porque dice la Biblia que Dios *«levantará pendón a las naciones, y juntará los desterrados de Israel, y reunirá los esparcidos de Judá de los cuatro confines de la tierra»* (Isaías 11:12).

El libro de Galileo fue añadido al «Índice» (la lista oficial) de libros que se opone al dogma de la iglesia católica romana. Y ahora el mundo sabe que Galileo tenía razón.

2. Los «derechos divinos» de los reyes (es decir, los políticos y poderosos).

Toda alma sométase a las potestades superiores; porque no hay potestad sino de Dios; y las potestades que hay, de Dios son ordenadas. Así que, el que se opone a la potestad, se opone a la ordenanza de Dios; y los que resisten recibirán para sí condenación (Romanos 13.1-2).

- Que la monarquía es una institución de ordenación divina. El derecho hereditario por virtud del nacimiento es irrevocable.
- Los reyes son responsables sólo ante Dios. La monarquía es pura, ya que la soberanía radica por entero en el rey, cuyo poder no tiene límites legales.
- La no-resistencia y la obediencia pasiva son prescripciones divinas. En cualquier circunstancia, la resistencia al rey—porque es el «elegido» de Dios— es un pecado que acarrea la condenación eterna.

3. La esclavitud de las personas.

Siervos, obedeced en todo a vuestros amos según la carne, no sirviendo al ojo, como los que agradan a los hombres, sino con sencillez de corazón, temiendo a Dios (Colosenses 3.22).

Aunque queda claro que Dios está al lado de los oprimidos y perseguidos—si uno evalúa el panorama entero de la Biblia en vez de sacar unos versículos particulares fuera del contexto—versículos como este han sido utilizado por los poderosos para discriminar, esclavizar, oprimir, y negar los derechos básicos humanos a segmentos enteros de la raza humana (indígenas, africanos, mujeres, niños...).

4. Algunos peligros actuales. ¿Cuáles pueden ser algunas interpretaciones equivocadas en la actualidad? ¿Qué peligro corremos en ellas?

- a) La idolatría de la Patria (el nacionalismo). Dios fundó una nación cristiana, bendecida por Él, mejor que las otras. Los eventos trágicos que resultaron en el «Holocausto» (que quiere decir sacrificio quemado, un tema frecuente del Antiguo Testamento). Alrededor de seis millones de judíos en Alemania tenían mucho que ver con la actitud alemana de que son los elegidos por Dios y que los judíos fueron quienes mataron a Jesús.



- b) La idolatría de la Biblia. Como hizo la Iglesia Católica hace muchos siglos con la Biblia Vulgata Latina. La iglesia persiguió, encarceló, y a veces ejecutó a cristianos (Jan Hus, Tyndale, Lutero entre ellos) que pretendieron traducir la Biblia en los idiomas maternos, para que la Palabra sea alcanzable por la gente.

Hoy tenemos personas que declaran que hay una traducción «pura» que sea la única «inspirada». ¡Hasta que se han declarado las otras traducciones de la Biblia como «satánicas»! Esto ha sucedido entre ciertas iglesias fundamentalistas en los Estados Unidos, que juran que la versión del Rey Santiago (King James) la Inglaterra es la única Biblia correcta.

La Biblia es inspirada por Dios, claro que sí, pero la Biblia no es Dios. Creemos en el Dios Trino, no un dios de «cuatro personas» (Dios no es Padre, Hijo, Espíritu Santo, y Biblia). Hay personas que, si uno no está de acuerdo en que la Biblia es históricamente literal en todo sentido, que debe ser interpretada en forma literal, declaran que usted no es cristiano. ¡Que un hermano diga a otro, «usted no es cristiano porque no cree lo que creo yo»! Para adoptar tal posición en forma dogmática está ignorando un mensaje principal de la Biblia, que somos hermanos y hermanas en Jesús, y «*Así nosotros, siendo muchos, somos un cuerpo en Cristo, y todos miembros los unos de los otros*» (Romanos 12.5).

- c) La teología de la palabra de fe (Confesión positiva)

Tiene dos aspectos principales, *La Prosperidad* y *La Sanidad (sanación milagrosa)*. Dios hizo unas promesas que Él tiene que cumplir (son garantías):

La Prosperidad

Antes acuérdate de Jehová tu Dios; porque Él te da el poder para hacer las riquezas, a fin de confirmar su pacto que juró a tus padres, como en este día.

Deuteronomio 8.18

Porque todo aquel que pide, recibe; y el que busca, halla; y al que llama, se le abrirá.

Mateo 7.8

Sostiene que, Dios hace ricos todos los cristianos que *tienen fe suficiente* para recibir la bendición. ¿Qué dice esto acerca de los siervos de Dios que lucha todos los días para servir al Señor, pero vive en un estado de pobreza extrema? La otra cara de la misma moneda dice que los pobres son pobres porque no tiene fe suficiente para recibir la bendición financiera que Dios le daría.

La Sanidad

Ciertamente llevó Él nuestras enfermedades, y sufrió nuestros dolores; y nosotros le tuvimos por azotado, por herido de Dios y abatido. Más Él herido fue por nuestras transgresiones, molido por nuestros pecados; el castigo de nuestra paz fue sobre Él, y por su llaga fuimos nosotros curados.

Isaías 53.4-5

Para los cristianos con una «súper fe», la buena salud y la sanidad de las enfermedades también son *garantizadas*. El enfermo sólo tiene que pronunciar esta promesa *con suficiente fe*, y Dios tiene que cumplirla. Bajo esta premisa, la enfermedad es consecuencia de un problema espiritual, porque Dios ya le había sanado. El problema es suyo; usted no tiene fe suficiente para recibir la sanación.

d) Los profetas falsos y sus profecías

Porque vendrán muchos en Mi Nombre, diciendo: «Yo soy el cristo; y a muchos engañarán».

Mateo 24.5

Hoy hay muchos profetas hoy en día que proclaman «Así dice el Señor». Dicen que son los «ungidos» de Dios para declarar las buenas nuevas, y que son enviados para transformar el mundo para que Cristo pueda volver. Cristo no puede volver hasta que el mundo haya caído a los pies de ellos.

Se presentan ante los demás como representantes proféticos de Jesús. Profetizan acerca de riquezas que están por venir, o el crecimiento de un ministerio. Dicen muy poco de los «así dice el Señor» que se encuentra en la Biblia.

Jesús nos advirtió, y debemos prestar atención a lo que nos ha dicho, para discernir entre la mentira y la verdad.

Para reflexionar...

- ¿Cuáles son algunas maneras en que podemos minimizar el riesgo de hacer la *eiségesis* en vez de la *exégesis*?
- ¿Acaso puede recordar un sermón (o ha predicado uno) donde el desarrollo de su tema demuestra una *eiségesis* en vez de una buena *exégesis*?
- ¿Puede nombrar otras herejías que afectan la salud del Cuerpo de Cristo?
- ¿Cómo podemos, como líderes, combatir las enseñanzas heréticas en nuestros pueblos?
- ¿Cómo puede usted mejorar su habilidad como intérprete fiel a Dios?

LECCIÓN IV: LOS CUATRO EVANGELIOS

Una comparación de los cuatro evangelios²

¿Acaso alguna vez ha preguntado por qué hay cuatro evangelios, los cuales cuentan básicamente la misma historia? Hay numerosas teorías acerca del asunto. Tal vez, es porque los escritores dirigieron sus obras a lectores de culturas, religiones, hasta razas y países muy distintos. Los contextos, las sensibilidades y necesidades de cada cual es distinto.

Por ejemplo, el *evangelio de Jesucristo según san Mateo* fue dirigido a los judíos del primer siglo y toma en cuenta las costumbres, creencias y sensibilidades de ellos. Para los judíos es una ofensa decir el nombre de Dios. Entonces, según *Mateo*, Jesús caminaba predicando el «reino de los cielos». En cambio, el evangelio según san Marcos, fue dirigido al pueblo cristiano romano, un pueblo de gentiles (es decir, no judío). Simplemente se refería a Jesús predicando el «reino de Dios.»

Evangelio:	<i>Mateo</i>	<i>Marcos</i>	<i>Lucas</i>	<i>Juan</i>
Dirigido a los:	Judíos	Romanos	Griegos	La Iglesia
Nº capítulos	28	16	24	21
Material único (no repetido)	42%	7%	59%	92%
Referencias al Antiguo Testamento	53	36	25	20

Mateo, Marcos, Lucas y el «Problema Sinóptico»

No están 100% de acuerdo entre sí, pero muchos expertos bíblicos piensan que, además de ser inspirados por Dios, los evangelios *sinópticos*—los de *Mateo, Marcos* y *Lucas*—tienen otros vínculos. Se han desarrollado unas teorías acerca de las fuentes de información que los evangelistas consultaron mientras escribieron su evangelio. Se basan esta teoría en la improbabilidad de que dos o tres escritores podrían haber elegido prácticamente el mismo fraseo y la misma redacción que el otro, si no se había utilizado fuentes en común.

² Paul N. Benware, *Comentario Bíblico Portavoz: Panorama del Nuevo Testamento*. (Grand Rapids: Portavoz, 1993), 44.

Como hemos visto, cada escritor parece haber escrito para una audiencia específica, sean los judíos, los romanos, o los griegos. Los escritores comparten la misma historia, pero de una manera más adecuada para que el mensaje sea recibido por el público que lo escuche. Esto explica algunas diferencias entre ellos. Hay que preguntar ¿por qué hay unos pasajes extensos, donde las palabras y la fraseología son casi idénticas? Las similitudes no pueden ser ignoradas; se requiere una explicación.

Sería posible, si todos fueron «testigos oculares» al ministerio de Jesús, que esto explicaría las similitudes. Aun así, si dos personas están viendo la misma película y luego escriben un ensayo acerca de lo que vieron, no lo van a contar con las mismas palabras exactas. Más bien, por lo menos en el caso de *Lucas*, él mismo dijo que no era un testigo:

Por cuanto muchos han tratado de poner en orden y escribir una historia de las cosas que entre nosotros son muy ciertas (y hay plena convicción), tal como nos las dieron a conocer los que desde el principio fueron testigos oculares y ministros de la palabra (del evangelio), también a mí me ha parecido conveniente, después de haberlo investigado todo con diligencia desde el principio.

Lucas 1.1-3

Si sabemos que Lucas no fue un testigo ocular, ¿cuál fue su fuente de información? Las teorías de las fuentes pretenden contestar no sólo esta pregunta sino también explicar las múltiples similitudes entre los tres evangelios de Mateo, Marcos, y Lucas—los *evangelios sinópticos*. La coincidencia es tal que no es posible otorgarle una redacción a partir de la tradición oral, sino que hubo un proceso de copia.

Unas posibles fuentes

1. Que los escritores eran testigos oculares (aunque no fue el caso con Lucas).
2. Que hubo otras fuentes que ahora están perdidas, como la hipotética fuente denominada «Q» (en alemán, «quelle» quiere decir *fuentes*). Esta teoría es basada en el hecho de que hay temas y versículos comunes en *Mateo* y *Lucas* que no aparecen en *Marcos*.
3. *Que uno de los evangelios fue utilizado por los otros evangelistas*. Porque 93% del evangelio de san Marco se repite en Mateo y Lucas, si esta teoría es correcta, Marcos sería una de las fuentes para los otros dos. Significaría que *Marcos* fue escrito primero.
4. Para las partes que no son repeticiones, es material original del evangelio.
5. La tradición oral. Sin embargo, donde hay pasajes que son tan exactos, se consideran que no es probable en ciertas partes (Compárese, por ejemplo, Mateo 11.7-11 y Lucas 7.24-28).

Juan: el evangelio «no sinóptico»

Un 92% del *Evangelio según San Juan* es material original. ¿Por qué? Una posible razón: si *Juan* fue el último evangelio escrito, muchos años después de los otros tres, el evangelista no tenía por qué repetir lo que ya había escrito. Además, con el paso de los años, hubo más tiempo para reflexionar acerca del significado del ministerio de Jesús. La teología y la Cristología de *Juan* es «más allá» que las de los sinópticos.

El evangelio según Juan es muy distinto en su contenido. Algunas diferencias entre *Juan* y los otros evangelios, incluyen:

- No hay milagros (dicho así) en *Juan*. Son «signos.» Un signo es una señal, como una flecha que le dirija al camino pero no es el destino. Un signo no existe por sí mismo.
- El relato acerca de la boda en Caná, donde Jesús se convirtió el agua en vino, lo que consideramos el primer milagro realizado por Jesús (llamado un «signo» por *Juan*) se encuentra solamente en *Juan*.
- El relato acerca del lavado de los pies de los discípulos, se encuentra solo en Juan (mientras la Santa Cena es ausente).
- Además, Juan no menciona:
 - El nacimiento de Jesús
 - El bautismo de Jesús
 - La transfiguración de Jesús
 - El exorcismo de demonios
 - La agonía de Jesús en Getsemaní
 - La Santa Cena
- La «hora» es un tema que permea el evangelio, un tema que es único a Juan:
 - *Jesús le dijo: «¿Qué tienes conmigo, mujer? Aún no ha venido mi hora» (2.4).*
 - *Ninguno le echó mano porque aún no había llegado su hora (7.30).*
 - *Jesús les respondió diciendo: Ha llegado la hora para que el Hijo del Hombre sea glorificado (12.23).*
 - *Ahora está turbada mi alma ¿y qué diré? ¿Padre sálvame de esta hora? Más para esto he llegado a esta hora (12.27).*
 - *Antes de la fiesta de la Pascua, sabiendo Jesús que su hora había llegado para que pasase de este mundo al Padre (13.1).*
 - *Estas cosas habló Jesús, y alzando los ojos al cielo, dijo: «Padre la hora ha llegado; glorifica a tu Hijo, para que el Hijo te glorifique a ti» (17.1).*

- Lo más destacado del evangelio de Juan es el énfasis en la *pre-existencia* de Cristo:
 - *Antes que Abraham fuese, yo soy* (8:58)
 - *Yo soy la luz del mundo* (8.12)
 - *Yo soy la resurrección y la vida* (11.25)
 - *Yo soy el camino, la verdad, y la vida* (14.6)
 - *Yo soy la puerta... el buen pastor... el pan de vida... la vida verdadera...*

Para reflexionar

- ¿Qué piensa usted acerca de la teoría que *Mateo* y *Lucas* utilizaba *Marcos* como fuente común, o que hubo otras posibles fuentes como «Q»?
- ¿Hay maneras en que una comparación entre los evangelios sinópticos puede afectar la hermenéutica? Por ejemplo, en «las bienaventuranzas» del sermón del monte (*Mateo* 5) y las del sermón del llano (*Lucas* 6) hay similitudes y diferencias. ¿Cómo puede afectar la interpretación de los dos pasajes?
- ¿Por qué piensa usted que *Juan* es único entre los cuatro evangelios? ¿Qué podemos aprender de las diferencias, por ejemplo, que en *Juan* no hay milagros? ¿O de la ausencia de la Santa Cena y la presencia del lavado de los pies?

LECCIÓN V: LA EXÉGESIS

Recordamos que la meta de la crítica bíblica es realizar una buena *exégesis* del texto, la cual consiste en un proceso de estudiar la Biblia para sacar el significado del texto. «*Exégesis*» significa extraer el significado de un texto dado.

Algunos principios fundamentales de la hermenéutica:³

1. Es el Espíritu Santo quien inspiró al escritor y es el mismo Espíritu Santo quien sigue iluminando el proceso hermenéutico para el/la intérprete hoy.
2. Muchas veces la Biblia interpreta a la Biblia. El mismo tema se presenta en otro pasaje en otro contexto o por otro escritor. Estos pasajes similares informan al intérprete y por ende nos ayudan interpretar. Véase por ejemplo Éxodo 20:11 y Deuteronomio 5:15. Las razones dadas por el mandamiento acerca el día de reposo (el sábado) son distintas, aunque se refieren al mismo mandamiento.
3. Cristo es nuestro punto de referencia en la interpretación de la Biblia entera. Somos seguidores y seguidoras de Él, y esto afecta como leemos el Antiguo Testamento y como interpretamos algunas enseñanzas de las epístolas del Nuevo Testamento, que a veces causan conflictos en la iglesia.
4. Observe el contexto e interpreta de acuerdo con el contexto inmediato (los versículos anteriores y posteriores) y contexto remoto. El contexto remoto puede ser, por ejemplo, el tema general del libro o de la sección donde aparece el pasaje.
5. Si el pasaje tiene un paralelo (por ejemplo, en los evangelios sinópticos), estudie los dos o más. ¿Hay unas diferencias entre ellos? ¿Por qué?
6. Un pasaje puede tener más que una aplicación—lo que significaba para los oyentes del contexto original, y lo que dice a nosotros hoy. Por ejemplo, la *epístola a los gálatas* tenía un contexto único que no se encuentra hoy exactamente (el tema de la circuncisión no es algo que nos preocupa hoy). Sin embargo, la epístola tiene mucho que decir a nosotros.
7. Es difícil interpretar algunos pasajes sin comprender algunos aspectos tanto de la lengua y la cultura hebrea así como la grecorromana. No podemos entender algunas cosas que dijo e hizo Jesús sin conocer un poco acerca de la cultura y las prácticas de su época.

³ Guajardo, Alcides. *Formación ministerial indispensable: herramientas y consejos prácticos para el ministerio*, 2a ed. Mundo Hispano, 2009, 33-34.

Un sistema básico y práctico para realizar una exégesis

1. Lea el pasaje en su Biblia favorita y haga una interpretación preliminar por escrito. Haga preguntas al pasaje acerca de qué, quién, cómo, por qué, etcétera.
2. Lea el mismo pasaje en otras traducciones (NVI, RVR, Biblia de las Américas...). ¿Hay diferencias? ¿Pueden afectar la interpretación inicial?
2. Consulte los recursos que tiene a mano (concordancia, comentarios, diccionarios teológicos...), para profundizar su entendimiento acerca del pasaje.
3. Intente contestar las siguientes preguntas:
 - ¿Quién fue que escribió el pasaje (no siempre es conocido)?
 - ¿A quién fue dirigido lo escrito originalmente (los israelitas en el exilio babilonio, los judíos cristianos en la dispersión, los gentiles en Roma...)?
 - ¿Hay algo acerca de la cultura, las creencias, o las prácticas del pueblo que podía afectar como los oyentes originales escucharon el mensaje?
 - Al leer los versículos que proceden y suceden el pasaje de enfoque, ¿hay más información que puede aclarar el mensaje?
 - ¿Qué dicen en los comentarios? ¿Está usted de acuerdo de las opiniones de ellos? ¿Por qué sí o por qué no?
 - ¿Hay algo en el pasaje que es problemático que le hace sentir «incómodo»? Investiga lo más que sea posible. Por ejemplo:
 - Una mujer vino a Jesús, desesperada por su hija quien fue atormentada por un demonio, y Jesús la dijo: «No está bien tomar el pan de los hijos, y échalo a los perrillos» (Mateo 15:21-28).
 - La primera «señal» de Jesús fue convertir agua en vino (Juan 2). Sabemos que el abuso y adicción al alcohol y drogas es un problema grande. ¿Qué va a hacer con este milagro?
 - Dios no protegió a los inocentes cuando Herodes, en su intento de eliminar el «rey de los judíos», mandó soldados a matar a los niños en Belén (Mateo 2:13-16).
 - ¿Basado en lo que descubrió por medio de sus investigaciones, qué mensaje tiene hoy el pasaje para usted, su iglesia, o para el mundo?

LECCIÓN 6: UNA EXÉGESIS DEL LIBRO PROFÉTICO JONÁS

Un profeta es «alguien que es vocero por Dios, inspirado por visión u otra forma, y a quien se le da a conocer el pensamiento de Dios, y declara lo que ha visto como un mensaje para el pueblo.»⁴

Un bosquejo muy breve del libro de Jonás

Capítulo Uno:	El llamado y la desobediencia de Jonás
Capítulo Dos:	La oración de Jonás
Capítulo Tres:	La predicación de Jonás
Capítulo Cuatro:	Las quejas de Jonás

Datos que notar acerca de la historia

1. ¿Cuál fue la profecía (la palabra de Jehová) que Jonás recibió de Dios?
2. ¿Cómo respondió Jonás?
3. ¿Cómo reaccionó Dios?
4. ¿Qué hizo Jonás después de ser tragado por un pez?
5. ¿Qué hizo Jonás después de que el pez lo vomitó en la orilla del mar?
6. ¿Cómo reaccionó el pueblo Ninivita al mensaje que predicó Jonás?
7. ¿Qué hizo Jonás cuando se arrepintieron los Ninivitas?

Antes de realizar una exégesis con las herramientas de investigación que tiene a mano, anote en unas dos o tres oraciones cómo explica su interpretación inicial del pasaje:

Consultar los comentarios, diccionarios bíblicos, etcétera

He aquí unas sugerencias de datos que deben ser investigados. ¿Quizás tenga otras ideas? ¡Adelante! Más que la historia básica hay algunos datos mencionados que puedan ser importantes (deben ser investigados) para profundizar nuestra interpretación.

⁴*Diccionario Bíblico Mundo Hispano*, Douglas, J.D. and Merrill C. Tenney. 2009.

1. ¿Dónde están las ciudades de Nínive, Jope y Tarsis?
2. ¿Cuál el estilo o género literario?
3. ¿Qué se requería para realizar un viaje desde Jope hasta Tarsis en aquellos días?
4. ¿Qué más podemos saber de la persona Jonás? ¿Es mencionado en otra parte de la Biblia? ¿Algo de su cultura?
5. Nombre algunas posibles razones que explican por qué Jonás no quiso predicar a los ninivitas.
6. ¿Qué puede averiguar acerca de los marineros?
7. ¿Cuáles son las probables fechas de cuando fue escrito el libro y cuándo sucedieron los eventos presentados en la historia?
8. ¿Qué puede saber acerca de las prácticas religiosas de la época?

La hermenéutica y la aplicación

1. ¿Qué podemos aprender acerca de Dios por medio de este relato?
 2. ¿Qué podemos aprender acerca de nosotros por medio de este relato?
 3. ¿Cuáles son unas posibles aplicaciones para mí en mi vida personal, en mi papel como líder?
 4. ¿Qué mensaje hay en ello para mi congregación y para el mundo?
 5. Apunta lo que más le impresionó acerca de la historia. ¿Hay algo nuevo aprendido a través de su investigación que podría afectar la interpretación (hermenéutica) y la aplicación de lo estudiado?
-
-

LA VARA RECTA

La Biblia contiene la historia de Cristo.

La Iglesia existe para contar la historia de Cristo.

La historia de la Iglesia es una continuación de la historia Bíblica.⁵

LAS «-DADES» DE UN BUEN INTÉRPRETE

Humildad

Espiritualidad

Responsabilidad

Integridad

⁵ Henry H. Halley, *Manual Bíblico de Halley*, (1924; repr. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

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APPENDIX I

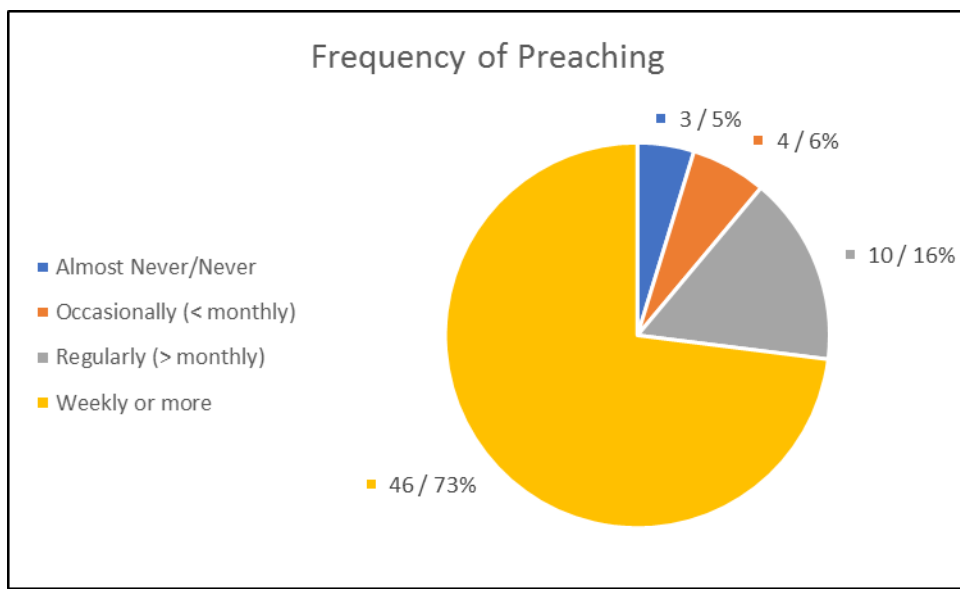
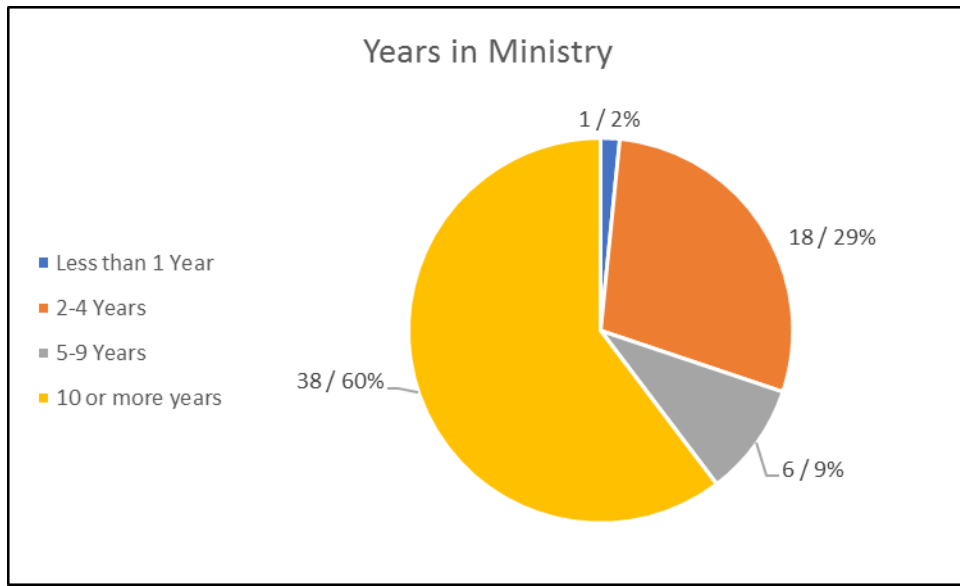
“Preachers on Preaching” Survey

Respondents’ Demographic Profile (63 Total Respondents)

Gender Profile			Ethnic Profile		
Male	30	48%	Caucasian	50	79%
Female	32	51%	Latino/a	12	19%
Not Specified	1	2%	African American	1	2%
Total	63	100%	Total	63	100%

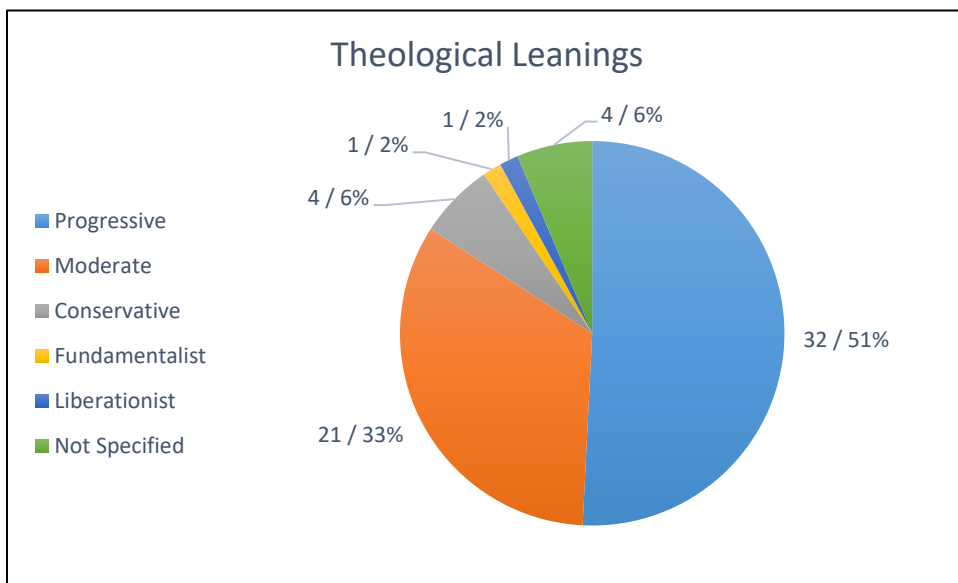
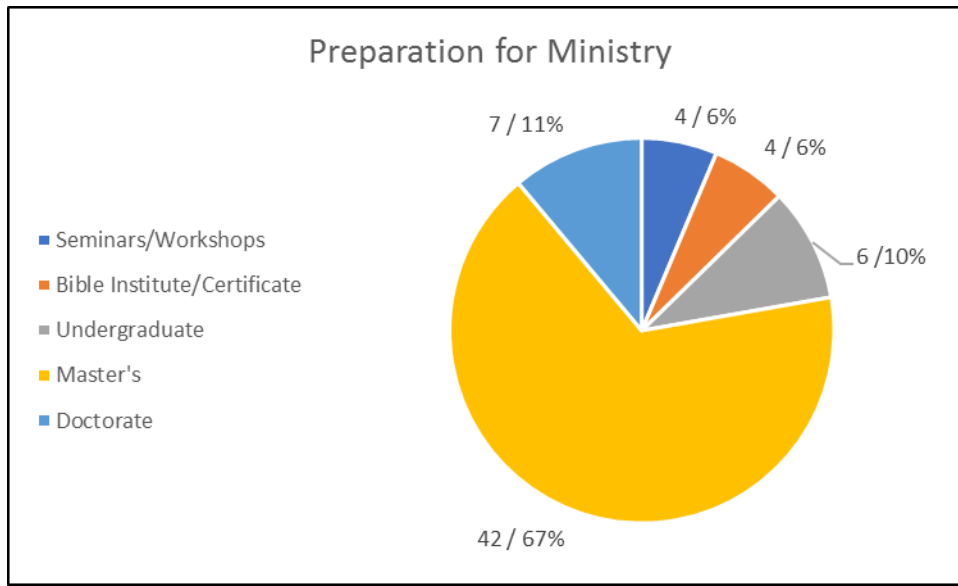
There were no significant variations in responses based upon gender, ethnicity, academic preparation, denominational affiliation, or theological “leanings”, so results were aggregated. For responses in the categories which follow, responses were standardized (e.g. “relevant to congregation” and “applicable to congregation” are combined). Responses which were unique (only listed once) have been eliminated.

Average time to complete the survey, consisting of 14 questions, including demographic classifications, was under 10 minutes. For the survey in Spanish, 19 respondents attempted the survey, but only 13 completed it, a 32% abandonment rate. For the survey published in English, the abandonment rate was 19%.



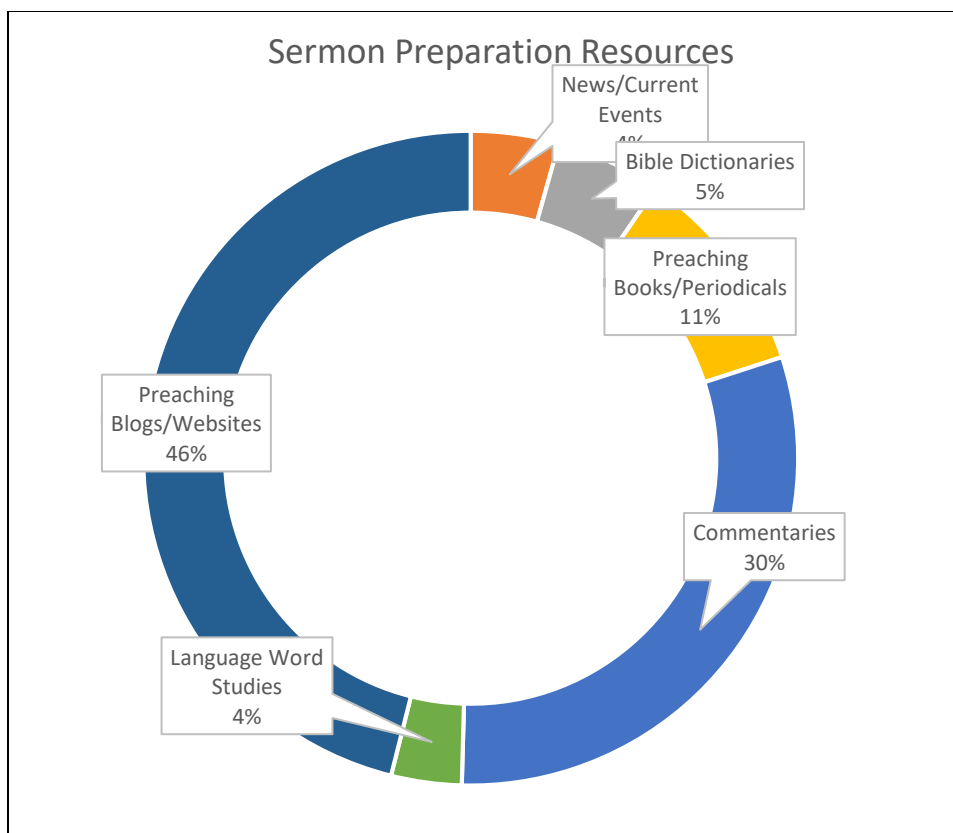
Observations

Only 2% of respondents are new to ministry. More than one-half of respondents have served in ministry for 10 or more years. All but 5% preach on a regular basis. Therefore, the advice given is primarily from seasoned practitioners.



Observations

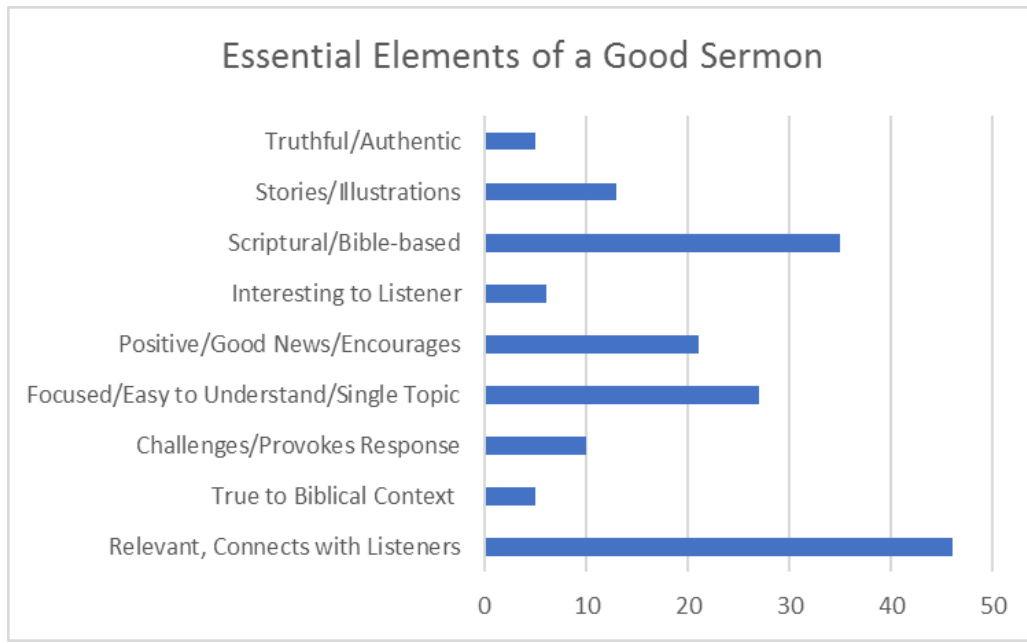
There were no significant variations between theological “leanings” and preparation for ministry, which was somewhat surprising. Generally, among respondents, only one indicated that (she) had no formal training. However, for 12% of the population, their preparation was limited to Bible Institute/certificate programs or denominational workshops and seminars. This may indicate that they lack academic prerequisites for undergraduate and graduate studies, but there is no way to confirm this.



Sermon Preparation Resources		
News/Current Events	5	4%
Bible Dictionaries	6	5%
Preaching Books/Periodicals	12	10%
Commentaries	35	30%
Language Word Studies	4	3%
Preaching Blogs/Websites	53	46%
Total	115	100%

Observations (open-ended question, respondents listed as many as they wished)

Among the respondents, Internet-based blogs and websites dedicated to preaching (textweek.com, workingpreacher.com, etc.) were most frequently recommended (46%), followed by commentaries (30%). The breadth and depth of resources online provide greater accessibility to information and preachers rely extensively on technology, while traditional study resources such as commentaries remain widely used.



Essential Elements of Good Sermons (1st, 2nd, 3rd choice)		
Relevant, Connects with Listeners	46	27%
True to Biblical Context	5	3%
Challenges/Provokes Response	10	6%
Focused/Easy to Understand/Single Topic	27	16%
Positive/Good News/Encourages	21	13%
Interesting to Listener	6	4%
Scriptural/Bible-based	35	21%
Stories/Illustrations	13	8%
Truthful/Authentic	5	3%
Total	168	100%

Observations (open-ended question, respondents listed as many as they wished)

Preachers want their congregations to learn and apply what they learn. Relevancy for the listener was mentioned more than any other item, followed by Scriptural and Bible-based. This may have been assumed by some respondents and therefore not mentioned.

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VITA

Ruth Clowater was born in December 1956 in Sussex County, New Jersey of Canadian parents. After high school, she relocated to the Chihuahuan Desert of the Big Bend region of the Rio Grande, where she formed lifelong friendships on both sides of the river. Ruth later moved to Virginia, where she earned a B.A. in business from Mary Baldwin College. She worked for several years as a CPA in the non-profit sector, then hopped into the high-adrenaline world of information technology during the peak of the dot-com boom. After the boom went bust, she enrolled in the Master of Divinity program of the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, Virginia.

While enrolled at BTSR, Ruth visited Central America, where she sensed God's "holy nudge" that caused her to sell her home and "go." During one visit to the tropical rainforest, she met Carlos Espinoza, who originates from the San Juan River, and they married in 2006. She and Carlos are "ministers of encouragement" with SIGA ("Servants in Grace Abounding") Ministry Partners, a 501(c)3 which Ruth founded in 2005. Their home is in the rainforest village of Arbolitos de Sarapiquí, close in proximity to the Nicaraguan border. SIGA's work straddles the San Juan, with initiatives in both countries.

Ruth and Carlos are self-supporting: Carlos is a farmer, boat builder, and jack of many trades. Ruth is a CPA and business partner with her sons Martin and Joseph Villa, in a masonry contracting firm located in Charlottesville, Virginia. She will complete the *Liderazgo Pastoral* track of the Doctor of Ministry program at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in May of 2017.